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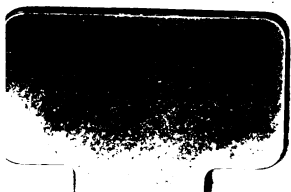
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PAUL
KNOX
FITMAN





PAUL KNOX, PITMAN.

BY

JOHN BERWICK HARWOOD,

AUTHOR OF

"LADY FLAVIA," "LORD LYNN'S WIFE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



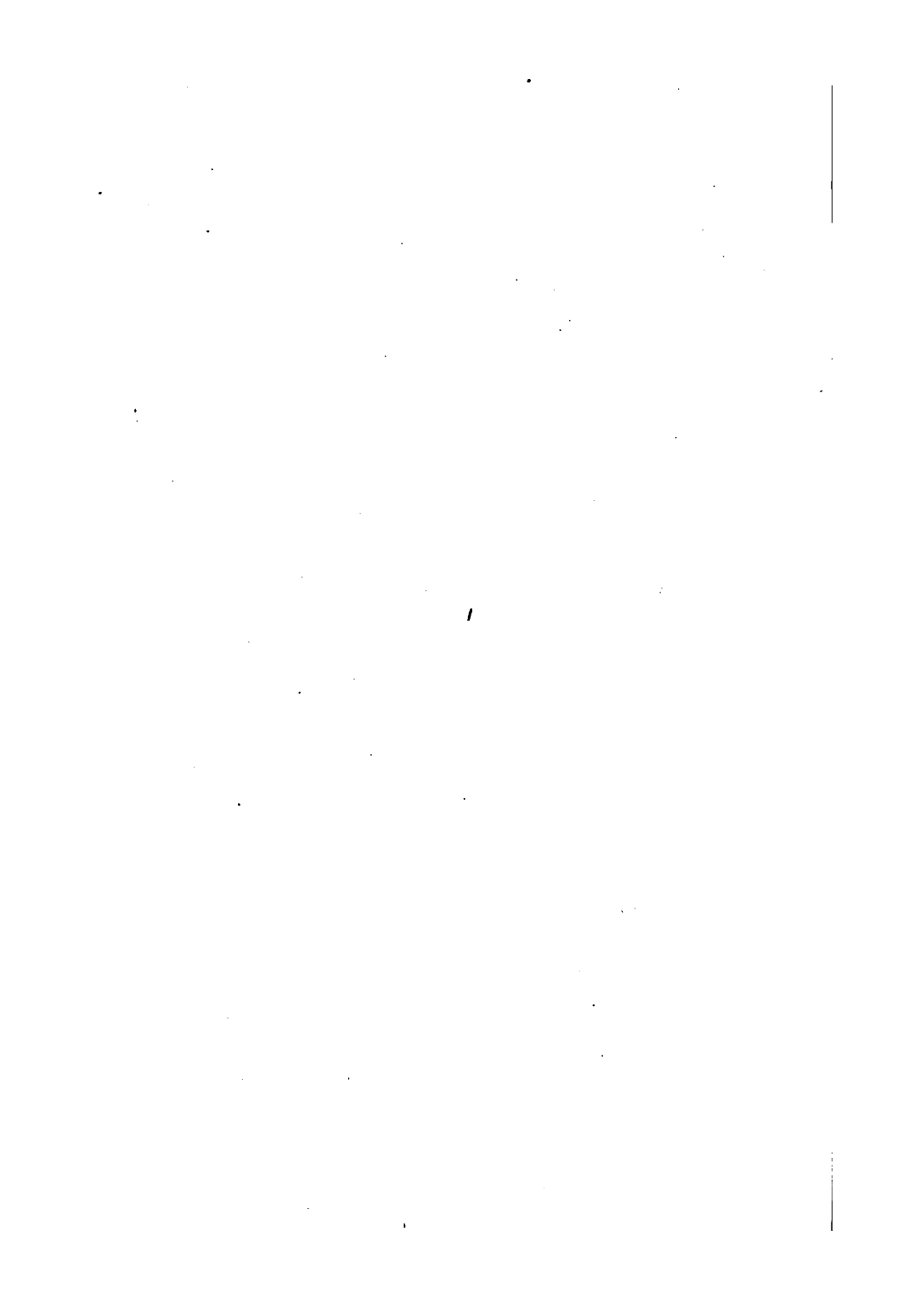
LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1878.

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251 . e . 213 .



CONTENTS OF VOL. I.



CHAPTER	PAGE
I. TWO MINUTES TOO LATE . . .	1
II. THE DISPOSAL OF THE WAIF . . .	25
III. INTRODUCES MR. GWYNN . . .	39
IV. PAUL KNOX.	65
V. AT THE GATE	89
VI. EARLY MEMORIES	108
VII. THE "OLD DEEPS"	116
VIII. "ARCADES AMBO"	133
IX. TROUBLED TIMES	146
X. BY THE HONEYSUCKLE HEDGE . . .	165
XI. A MIDNIGHT RAID	191
XII. ON THE BANKS OF THE TYNE CANAL	212
XIII. THE OLIVE-BRANCH	236
XIV. MAY AND HER FRIENDS	249



PAUL KNOX, PITMAN.



CHAPTER I.

TWO MINUTES TOO LATE.

“**N**OW then, Joe! wake thee up,
and look sharp too, my lad,
or thou’ll get fined again,
and what that means, in a house where
at best the pot’s gey hard to keep
on the boil—thou knowest, Joe, as well
as me. Dinnot stay to stretch thyself,
but gang briskly, lest ill come o’t.”

As she spoke, the old woman, whose careworn face looked the thinner for the ragged grey hairs that straggled from beneath her loosely-tied cap, grasped the sleeper's arm, and shook it sharply, till he reluctantly awoke, rubbing his half-closed eyes.

"Eh, mother, I'm only just lain down!" he said querulously; and as he spoke he feigned a purpose of turning round on the poor truckle-bed of coarse flock, on which he had been lying asleep fully dressed. "'Tis not time yet."

"An hour and a quarter, I tell 'ee, good measure too!" returned his parent, with another and more imperative jerk than before; "the wag at the wa' struck eleven before I stirred from the houseplace, and at 11.23 ye ken the express for the North will be due at the

Junction. Step it, Joe, and get to thy signal-box before the inspector hears ye're absent, my doo!"

The man, a slight-built, pallid young fellow, sat up on the bed, and then, with an evident effort, staggered to his feet.

"Here's for't," he said, yawning, and stumbling awkwardly as he made his way across the broken brickwork of the cottage floor. "Flesh and blood can't bear this for ever; twenty-three shillings a week, and on duty, of late, never less than eighteen hours a day—more often twenty. I wish the Board, as they call it, had to take a spell of this work. I'm fair wore out, for one. It's a dog's life!"

And with his hat slouched over his brows, and his head bending wearily on his breast, he shambled hurriedly off along the grimy, cinder-strewn road,

towards where a row of white posts, spanned by slim wires that stood out blackly against the dull grey sky of night, marked the scene of his official duty.

The old woman looked after him till his retreating figure was no longer visible, and then shook her head, as she said grumblingly to herself—

“Poor lad! poor lad! Eh, sirs, it comes of being born a weakling. If he’d been fit to swing a pick, like his feyther, he’d have had his work, and his sport, and his sleep, as a man ought. Poor lad!”

And with a second shake of the head she shut the cottage-door, and began to rake the ashes over the fire that burned brightly on the hearth—coal was a cheap necessary in that district—as a preliminary to retiring for the night.

Meanwhile the man who had been addressed as Joe plodded on till he came to a white gate, opened it, and crossing the iron rails, and the moist gravel that crunched and crackled beneath his tread, reached the box—painted glaring white too, as were the telegraph posts; and the tall gallows-like signal station some hundred yards away—which was his shelter against the weather, and might almost be described as his home, so continual was his occupancy of it. He did not immediately enter it, however, but glanced first at the gaunt signal scaffold above mentioned, whereon gleamed certain coloured lamps, and then at the lights of the railway station half a mile off, and then in the opposite direction, where the blackness of the night was only broken by a ruddy glow which this

watcher well knew to ascend from the great fire kindled beside some yawning pit-mouth, within easy distance of the railway, trending south. Satisfied, apparently, by the result of this hasty survey, Joe unlocked the door of his cabin with a key which he took from his pocket, went in, and proceeded to light and trim his smoky lamp, and to consult, first the thin black hands as they crawled around the dial-plate of his little clock, and then his well-thumbed book of instructions. Next, sallying out, he proceeded to assure himself that the apparatus of iron levers committed to his care was in good order and would work smoothly; and then, with a faint sigh, half of relief, half of peevishness, he went back to his box. Another peep at the clock, another reference to the

dog's-eared volume of instructions, and then Joe, first blowing on his red fingertips, which had been chilled by the raw fog without, thrust his cold hands into the depths of his baggy pockets and yawned for a second, and then for a third time, since his awakening from his short snatch of grudging sleep, propping himself in a position more fit for some wooden actor in a puppet-show than for a man, by leaning against the shallow desk, on which lay the crumpled book, in company with several printed and tabulated forms purporting to be reports ready to be filled up. He nodded presently, and, with drooping eyelids and incipient snore, was barely conscious; but, with a quick angry jerk, he shook off the drowsiness which was stealing in upon him, and cast a furtive look at the clock.

"11.21," he muttered, throwing a glance from his window, which commanded a full view of the tall signal-stand and the cheerful lights of the station beyond, "and nothing up yet. The North express will be late, of course. There's the heavy for the South, the Border Branch goods, and two mineral trains about due. Which comes first? The Border Branch, these two months and more. Close shaving, but that's no business of mine. Anyhow, the rails are clear."

And, as he spoke, he nodded off to sleep again, in a manner that would have been anything but reassuring to many a passenger dozing on the cushioned seats of the well-warmed and lighted compartments in first-class carriages of the express train flying northwards, could

but second-sight have revealed the condition of a man in the hollow of whose hand, so to speak, were all their lives. For Capel Junction, hard by the large but rambling colliery village of Capelle-Moors, is an important link in the iron chain that binds together North and South Britain, and the pointsman there might aptly be compared to a sentinel on whose vigilance depends the safety of a slumbering camp. Again, with a start and a jump, Joe shook off his lethargy.

“Nothing yet?” he growled out half-reproachfully, after a fresh inspection of the signals. “What ails the Border Branch, I wonder! Well, it’s lucky the express is allers a goodish bit behind. It’ll be time, directly, to set up the danger-lamp for the Branch, and switch the points clear for——”

He fell asleep again, while still speaking, leaning in his drowsy stupor against the desk; and the sound of his heavy breathing mingled with the sharp, low ticking of the clock, as one by one the precious, priceless seconds fell like tiny drops of water into the great gulf of eternity. There was a long, long pause; and then a shaking of the earth, and the harsh, strident note of the steam-whistle aroused Joe from his uneasy slumber, and with dismay he saw, on looking up at the signal-stand, that the arrangement of the warning-lamps had been altered; and he knew that he had neglected his duty, and that nothing but a miracle could stave off the coming evil. One bound and he was out of his box, and rushing towards the levers. Could he reach them, and set clear the rails before the

Red Eye hurrying down upon him should bring its baleful presence nearer, all might yet be well. But the Red Eye was too near, and the clash and clang of the whirling wheels too close at hand, and on, on dashed the northward-bound express to meet its fate.

There was a crash, and a roar, and a wild, dismal scream from the engine, mingling with and almost drowning the shrieks of human voices, and then a fearful sound of grinding metal, and splintering wood, and hissing steam, and a dull thud, as though a fighting giant had been beaten down to earth at last; and then a confused medley of noises, predominant over which was a wild wail of anguish—and the mischief was done.

The North express was off the rails, several carriages were knocked to match-

wood, all were more or less damaged; and the bursting of the boiler, and the red glow of the burning carriages nearest to the fire of the overturned engine, threatened the survivors of those who had suffered in the catastrophe with death in a shape yet more dreadful.

Loud, shrill, and piercing arose the cries of those imprisoned among the broken timbers: "Help! help!"

. Help, fortunately, was within call. From the pit-bank hard by came running a score of stalwart men, black as coal-dust could make them, swart and uncomely copies of the Good Samaritan, but who nevertheless worked like so many Titans in the task of tearing away shattered woodwork and twisted iron, to set the victims free before the cruel fire should creep, like a red snake, to where

they lay. From the station and from the village arrived fresh contingents of shouting rescuers, and heavy masses of ruin were dragged away, and water, hastily brought, was flung upon the smouldering embers of the sullen conflagration, and there was a Babel of voices uplifted in every possible key that could express alarm, horror, and pity; for by this time many women, from the colliers' cottages nearest to the scene of the accident, had come upon the ground.

Joe, the pointsman, who had been busy among the best of those engaged in the work of mercy, toiling fiercely, feverishly, to break through a monstrous mass of shattered timber and battered metal, from beneath which feeble moans were heard, almost maddening the men with-

out as they strained their sinews in the effort to burst through, suddenly became aware of a hand that grasped his collar, and, as he looked up, of a bull's-eye lantern turning its stream of light upon his pale face.

"You know, of course, Gubbins, that you have to answer for this night's job," said the station-master excitedly; "it will be the duty of Jones, here, not to lose sight of you until the inquiry is held."

The railway policeman to whom the bull's-eye lantern belonged, and who stood at the station-master's side, now laid his forefinger, with an expressive tap, on Joe's shoulder, and muttered between his teeth the mystic formula—

"Consider yourself in custody."

At another time Joseph Gubbins, salaried

railway servant, would have endured his arrest with sullen or peevish resignation to the inevitable. But now the horror of the situation gave him a vigour of character that raised him, for the moment, by some cubits above the humble level of his moral stature.

“Don’t take me now!” he cried out eagerly; “don’t rob a hand from those that are succouring the poor creatures yonder. When it’s over, settle scores, if you like.”

And, without waiting for a reply, he set to work again, rending and tearing at the reluctant timbers, and doing, as was afterwards said in evidence at the Durham Assizes, the best spell of labour the poor fellow had ever in his life performed, towards the undoing of the hideous mischief that his brief nap had

occasioned. All present — police and station officials, miners, and farming men aroused from their sleep—worked with a will, worked as volunteers work to keep down the flames of a burning house, not as hirelings dawdle through their half-hearted toil. And as fresh gangs of men came up to relieve those who were spent and breathless from their exertions, human energy proved too much for the fire, and the supply of fuel was cut off, and water was flung on the crimson embers till their hue faded to a dusky orange, and the last living being was dragged from underneath the wreck of the broken carriages.

The rough pitmen—for now the day-shifts, wakened out of the first heavy sleep that succeeded to the long hours of underground toil, had come hurrying up

30
by hundreds from the village, and the collier element preponderated among the rescuers—were strangely gentle as they carried the moaning burdens that were still sentient of pain, strangely reverent too as they bore along the mute loads whence came no cry, no moan—mere heaps and bundles of burned, bruised, or scalded humanity, lacking the life. One, two, three, four, five—ay, and a sixth and seventh. The list of those killed outright was no longer. The engine-driver, of course, was among the dead; the stoker badly hurt. The chief guard was dead, the brakesman dying; the other bodies, five in number, were those of passengers.

“Poor young thing! poor lass!” exclaimed half a score of colliers’ wives, as something, covered by a man’s shaggy

overcoat, was borne towards the school-house, now turned into a mortuary, wherein to harbour the lifeless forms for which surgery could do nothing.

“A leddy born, I’ll warrant her; look at the little white hand!” said one of the women, pointing towards the passive figure. Yes, she had been young, no doubt, and presumably a lady. But she had been snatched, dead, out of the thick of the fire, and was too much disfigured to render recognition practicable, nor did any of those who had survived the accident claim her as a relative or friend.

The uproar, din, and confusion had been so great during the process of rescuing the victims of the late catastrophe, that a weak, wailing cry, as from a child in pain, remained for a time unheard. At length the faint sound attracted the

notice of one of the searchers who had been among the busiest in exploring the mounds of shattered wood and shapeless iron, in quest of possible sufferers in need of release from their painful prison. He made a spring, alighting in the midst of a tall cluster of yellow broom that intercepted his view of a dimly discernible object lying just beyond, and over which he now stooped his head.

“Why, it’s a bairn!” he exclaimed in gaping wonder, and four or five of his companions came crushing through the belt of broom; “however did she get here?”

The cause of this not unnatural astonishment was a little, a very little girl, lying amidst the dull red blossoms of the autumn heather, like some moorland bird in its nest. She was to all appearance

unhurt, but it was with a scared look that she shrank from the collier who had been the first to discover her, and whose blackened face and grimy hands were, to her childish appreciation, alarming.

“She mun ha’ been flung, clear of the smash, when train run off rails,” said another man, who wore the fustian uniform of a railway porter; a pleasant-faced, fair-whiskered man of eight-and-thirty was this, and to him the child held up her little hands confidently.

“Please—where mamma?” she said.

The men looked at one another, some stupidly, the others with a half-perplexed shamefacedness, as though they felt themselves somehow responsible for the non-appearance of the missing mother for whom the child craved.

“A little lady, if there’s one north of

Humber. Look at her pretty hair, sleek as silk, and see how trim she is about her cleething. A rare May-flower this, to be chucked, like a flake of snow, in among us underground chaps," said the coal-miner who had espied her the first. "Heft her up, Bill Ridley, since she braids to you, the scrap of a thing!"

"I've five of them of my own," rejoined the railway porter, picking up the child as if she had been a feather, and smiling down encouragement as the timid, tiny creature nestled in his strong arms. "Whativer ens thy name, my dear?"

The question had to be repeated before the little girl understood its purport, and then, looking coyly up at the questioner, she made answer—

"May."

“May—what else, darling?” asked the fatherly porter.

“May!”—the child piteously repeated the familiar word, and then sobbed afresh. “May—little May. Where dear mamma?”

A pretty, but a pitiful sight, was this innocent, helpless mite of a girl, with her shining hair, pale gold in colour, and silken soft, floating loose; a bright, pure, winning face, and the slender form of a fairy. She was very young, a little baby-bit of a thing, and her tiny frock, and her tiny jacket, and her tiny hat were all neat and new. There was a coral necklace with golden clasp, and a coral heart dangling from it, around her neck, the only trinket she wore, but it was impossible to take her for anything else than a child of gentle blood and nurture,

a delicate, dainty morsel of girlhood, suddenly tossed into the midst of these rough, well-meaning fellows, who hardly knew what was to be done with her.

“Station-master—he’ll see to’t,” said one of the colliers, with that air of satisfaction which the uneducated are apt to evince at the prospect of shifting some troublesome responsibility to the shoulders of one of higher social position; “he’ll find out whom she belongs to.”

“She belongs, I fear, to one who cannot claim her on this side of the Great Day,” returned another and a deeper voice, as a tall young miner, more thoughtful of aspect and more accurate in speech than the others, joined the group. “You mind, all of you, seeing yonder poor lady carried up to the school-house?”

“Ay, Paul Knox, we do,” answered the porter Ridley; “you don’t surely mean——”

“Yes, but I do,” quickly rejoined the tall young pitman. “Every other female passenger—they were not many—has been brought away alive, and sensible, and not one of them has asked for a missing child. Luckily—nay, there is no such idle thing as luck—in mercy, rather, the little innocent cannot as yet feel the full weight of her heavy loss.”





CHAPTER II.

THE DISPOSAL OF THE WAIF.

“**W**HAT’S that you say? A child, eh? What, nobody to claim her? Ah, mother supposed to be among the killed? Sad case, indeed, but I don’t see what can be done, unless you send her to the Union.”

It was a county magistrate, the Reverend Robert Churton, Rector of Capel-le-Moors, who thus spoke, in response to the appeal of the puzzled station-master. It was as a justice of

the peace, not as a clergyman, that he had hastened to the scene of the late disaster, and as he stood, a fine portly figure of a man, with large light-coloured whiskers beginning to be tinged with early grey, half impatiently tapping his boots with the point of his riding-whip, while his groom, a few yards off, held his own and his master's horse, he presented no bad type of a class of old-fashioned, well-to-do parsons, now fast verging on extinction.

The needful arrangements, such as they were, for insuring medical attendance for those injured in the accident, had been made. The telegraph had been put under requisition to summon surgeons, by special engine, from the nearest large town, and messengers had been sent in search of such doctors as dwelt

within reach. Mr. Churton had promised that his housekeeper should take down with her a supply of lint and linen bandages, of cordials, pillows, and other necessaries, to the temporary infirmary that had been established in one wing of the school-house.

He would himself "look round," he said, early in the morning, though he doubted whether he could render any efficient service to those who lay groaning within those whitewashed walls. Mrs. Churton, with the children, was by the seaside, and her husband well knew that nursing was not his *forte*, but in his bluff, masterful way, he meant to show sympathy with the unfortunates who had been flung wounded at his door.

Then, as the rector-magistrate was about to remount, the station-master had

come up to inform him of the discovery of that poor little human stray, who could give no clearer indication of her identity than by lisping her name—May—and by calling upon an absent mother shrewdly suspected to be lying, charred and scorched, under a sheet in the school-house. Then it was that Mr. Churton made the speech, roughly uttered, but not unkindly meant, in which he had suggested the Union as a very proper haven wherein to deposit this little derelict of flesh and blood that had drifted into his parish.

There was a murmur among the women clustering around.

“Na, na, that should na be! Send the likes o’ her to the workhouse, pretty lamb! ’Tis a burning sin to think o’t.”

The rector frowned. He was not

popular in the huge, straggling parish of which he was at once patron and incumbent, and he knew it well, and repaid the vague dislike of which he was the object by a keen appreciation of the weak points of his flock. It was not entirely Mr. Churton's fault if he had not won golden opinions throughout the local limits of his cure of souls. He had his merits; did, according to his lights, his duty, and would probably have been beloved, had his sphere of duty lain in Dorset or Wilts, rather than in a colliery district of the north of England. He preached sermons which, if rather short, were full of safe doctrine and sound morality. He was generous in almsgiving, and, although he was one of those few men who grudge their time and trouble more than they do their money, would now

and then impart hearty and shrewd advice that was worth the having.

Capel-le-Moors was scarcely a fitting place for such a clergyman as the Reverend Robert. The decent, sober, God-fearing folks, whom it was impossible not to respect, in spite of a little hardness and narrowness which detracted somewhat from their amiability, if not their excellence, went to chapel, not to church. So much for the earnest minority. The lax majority of the parishioners led a jovial, hand-to-mouth, pagan sort of an existence, as untutored and highly-paid labouring people, with well-fed bodies, and minds starved and stinted of culture, often do. There was a scanty congregation, largely made up of old women, gathered together every Sunday beneath the shadow of Mr. Churton's pulpit. But

the superior attractiveness of excursion trains and boating on the river, of coursing-matches, an illicit dog-fight, or sheer beery idleness, kept away from his ministrations the bone and sinew of the parish.

When first — on succeeding to his grandfather, as incumbent of Capel-le-Moors, and owner of a small landed property situated in the same county—Mr. Churton had taken up his residence in the midst of the mining population, he had tried vigorously, if injudiciously, to effect a reform. He had failed, and he had given up the effort to succeed, which would, indeed, have tasked the self-denying devotion of a saint, and he was none such. He had gained little or no influence over the stubborn material with which he had to deal. His manners and tone were not liked, and his liberality

lacked the opportunity to display itself where high wages and plenty were the rule, and where even at the pinch of casual poverty a dogged pride prevented any appeal to the bounty of a social superior. It was but a lukewarm sentiment of disapprobation, after all, that Mr. Churton inspired. If his name had but been omitted from the list of justices of the peace, there might have been no such feeling. The colliers had no sort of objection to a gentleman for their rector, and manliness extorts respect everywhere; but the Reverend Robert was a disciplinarian, as clerical magistrates often are; he would punish and reprove where squires and baronets turned a blind eye to the peccadilloes of their rough neighbours. Public opinion in a mining district tolerates sundry queer things,

such as horse-play and practical joking, gambling, trespasses, prompted by the mere wanton wildness of frolicsome youth, albeit pheasants might be thinned by such raids, and an occasional bout of pugilism between fistic champions of local renown. Worse things, under the stimulus of strong drink, were sometimes done, and if not tolerated, were at any rate too easily condoned. The magistrate who viewed these things with stern eyes was not likely to be popular in that country-side.

So the rector was nettled, and he frowned.

“Let me see this foundling Phoenix,” he said harshly; but as Ridley, the porter, threw open his jacket, which he had wrapped around his tiny burden to shield it from the bleak night air, Mr. Churton’s

countenance assumed a more benign aspect.

“I don’t wonder,” he said good-humouredly, “that the little witch has taken the fancy of all of you, as she seems to have done. Is there no clue—none whatever—to her identity?”

The station-master was very much afraid that there was none. The chief guard, who had most to do with the passengers, and who could at least have told where the child entered the train, was dead, and his subordinate in desperate case. Little of the luggage had been saved out of the fire. The child was herself clearly unable to throw any light on the mystery; she knew herself by no other name than that of May.

“Ah, well! perhaps an advertisement in the London papers may bring forth

some explanation," said the rector. "In the mean time, some one ought to look to her."

"I," and "I," and "I," said several of the women present, speaking boldly and loudly, and yet with a sheep-faced, side-long glance at their respective husbands as they spoke, for the collier is commonly master and lord in his own cottage, and has no sympathy with modern doctrines of the equality of the sexes.

The rector looked dubiously from one applicant to another. "That would scarcely do," he said in a low voice. "What do you think, Leggatt?"

Mr. Leggatt, the station-master, did not quite like to enounce his opinion on so delicate a point; but he, like the rector, knew something of the inner life of a colliery village, its careless morals

and coarse manners, and he, too, hesitated. It would be ill for the little stranger to be entrusted—like a stray puppy or kitten—to the capricious kindness of the rough, noisy people around her. She was no fit playmate for the unkempt, brawling children—no fit recipient for the exuberant hospitality of a miner's dwelling.

Now, Mr. Leggatt himself had no wife, and, as has been previously said, Mrs. Churton was at the seaside.

“There is not one of us,” said a deep voice, the tones of which were the more impressive on account of the speaker's unconscious habit of weighing his words in some nicely-adjusted mental balance, “that would grudge a share of our meals or our shelter to this poor shorn lamb that the Lord hath sent among us. But

I think that the tender creature would be happier and healthier under other care, that that of our folk—well though they mean that offer to take her in.”

“Well said, Paul Knox,” returned the rector, genially, and yet with something of a sneer that he tried in vain to suppress; “it isn’t always when you preach that you and I are exactly of a mind, as I find we are now.”

The tall, raw-boned young miner made no verbal reply, but a slight flush mounted to his sallow face as he fixed his steady, earnest eyes upon the clerical magistrate. He was very young—not above seventeen, at the most—but his mien was one of unusual thoughtfulness, and there was even a quiet dignity in his speech and bearing which only self-discipline can impart.

“I’ll take the pretty May-blossom home with me, and my missis will be as careful of her, I’ll go bound, as though she were a gold guinea,” said Ridley, the porter ; and this proposition, meeting with the approval of both Mr. Churton and the station-master, was ratified by the general voice.

“I’ll see that proper inquiries are made, and advertisements inserted,” observed the rector, as he beckoned up his groom and remounted his horse. “And look here, Ridley, if——”

“Thank you, sir ; there’s no need for it. We’ll not miss the bit she eats,” answered the porter, touching his hat ; and so they parted.



CHAPTER III.

INTRODUCES MR. GWYNN.

“**T**HE Capel Railway Accident,” as it was henceforth called, produced precisely the same effect upon the world at large as a score of its precursors had done, and as a score of its successors are likely to do. There were sensational descriptions, headed with the tallest of capitals and the most startling of words, in the journals, quickly followed up by fiery leading articles, in which the railway interest was roundly rated, and

the peccant company pilloried, so far as print could attain that end. There were wrathful speeches, too, and platform promises of dire retribution to be exacted by legislative means, when the "House" should meet.

The railway interest, accustomed to be abused as Mawworm was to be despised, metaphorically shrugged up its shoulders and waited till the pelting shower of hard words should cease, and the short-lived indignation of the public burn itself out and be forgotten. Then came the inquest, and the official inquiry on the part of the Board of Trade, and the actions-at-law, and the "vindictive verdicts"—to quote the expostulatory harangue of the company's counsel learned in the law, when moving for a new trial—of the juries. The end of it all was, that the

company paid the damages or compromised the suits with regard to bodily injury, received the mild censure of Government authorities, issued reports and counter-statements, and at length buried the disaster under such a heap of print and paper and verbiage, that it disappeared wholly from the controversial field.

But matters were less comfortably settled as regarded Gubbins, the pointsman, who had to take his trial for manslaughter, and who was found guilty at the winter assizes. There must, in these cases, be a victim offered up at the altar of Themis—a flesh-and-blood representative of somebody's sin. For that somebody, corporate or personal, was answerable for lives lost and bodies mangled, on that sad night of the Capel Junction

catastrophe, was a fact scarcely denied, even by the apologetic organs of the railway companies. Wherefore, Joseph Gubbins, selected scapegoat, was duly put to the bar, tried, convicted, and sentenced. It was in a very faint voice that the poor fellow—in deference to the advice of the young barrister who, at the judge's request, undertook the unfee'd office of his defender—put in his conventional plea of "Not guilty." The twelve good and true men in a box, Palladium as they were of British liberties, overruled that feeble plea, and found Gubbins guilty.

So far the majesty of law had vindicated itself. No doubt, in a technical and authoritative point of view, Gubbins was guilty. He, being over one-and-twenty years of age, had, of his own free-

will, entered into a weekly contract with the company to execute a certain duty, for a practically unlimited number of hours, at a decidedly limited salary of twenty-three shillings. He had, in fact, pledged himself to keep perpetually awake, and to attend chronically to point-switching, by night and day, for his hebdomadary guerdon of three-and-twenty shillings. And the fault was, of course, in the frailty of the human mechanism that needs sleep as well as food, and wears out under protracted vigils as it does under fasting.

The company, it need scarcely be said, had its cut-and-dried precautions—its paper rules; and these were made good use of for the whitewashing of the powerful corporation of which Joseph Gubbins was a discarded vassal. No pointsman,

it was laid down, was to be on duty for more than thirteen—with a maximum of sixteen—hours at a stretch, excepting in cases of great and unavoidable emergency. The wretched Gubbins, if his statements as to the duration of his duties was to be accepted as correct (a point lightly glossed over by the Board), must have been singularly unlucky in chancing upon repeated cases of great emergency.

“I wish, prisoner, that I saw other persons, who better deserve it, beside you in the dock,” my lord judge had said, pulling down his wig and pushing up his spectacles, as he took a deliberate survey of the offending pointsman; and the bulk of the newspapers had endorsed the sentiment. As for poor Gubbins, nobody was inclined to treat him with very great severity. It was only in a conventional

sense that a weary, worn-out drudge deserved punishment for yielding to the irresistible summons of sleep ; and when the time came for passing sentence, the judge first wrote on his notes "six months' imprisonment," and then "three," and then "six" once more. "The poor fellow will be fed and sheltered, anyhow, till summer," his lordship afterwards explained to some familiar friends over the dinner-table ; "and at harvest-time he will get employment more easily than if he left gaol at Easter."

"Wasn't there a child picked up in that Capel affair, whose relations could not be found ? " was a question languidly asked in the smoking-room of more than one London club, by more than one man about town. "Yes, I believe so.

Mother killed. Lots of advertisements in the papers, and not a soul come forward, as there would have been, you may be sure, if there hadn't been a difficulty somewhere. Anyhow, the child's all right. So much attention directed to the case, you know. She's sure to be in clover somewhere," was the typical reply. For it is a part of the comfortable code of well-bred, selfish, bachelor worshippers of Number One, that whatever wayfarer falls among thieves, and lies naked and wounded by the roadside, is sure of snug accommodation with somebody else.

Meanwhile the future destinies of little May—tiny, living flotsam and jetsam of the railway disaster that had made Capelle-Moors for some few weeks a household word upon the lips of those who dwelt within the sea-girt limits of the three

kingdoms—still hung trembling in the balance. The careless commentators of the clubs, dreading above all things a subscription-list and the outlay of a guinea that could not very well be refused, were confident that the little waif was comfortably established somehow. Perhaps a Lady Bountiful—the race of rich old dowagers, with fat carriage-horses and handsome jointures, was not extinct—had taken charge of her. Perhaps the neighbourhood had made up a purse. Possibly even the chairman of the railway company had adopted the orphan of his own making, *per* Joseph Gubbins and the Board rules. At any rate, no doubt she was nicely taken care of.

“This can’t, in justice to our own, go on, William. Indeed, indeed it can’t. It

may sound cruel, but I speak for the best," said Mrs. Ridley, the porter's wife, under whose charge the little foundling had now been for some six weeks; and she spoke very decisively, though in a quiet tone of voice.

The soft-hearted, easy-tempered porter winced as he listened to his wife's words, the rather that he could not but admit that she was, according to all canons of worldly wisdom, in the right. Mrs. Ridley was a woman highly and deservedly respected, a pattern wife and model mother; but perhaps of a disposition slightly frigid, and sympathies that were cramped within the narrow orbit of her daily cares.

"Well, well, perhaps it won't be for long," said the porter, after a pause; but this attempt at temporizing did not meet

with the approval of his more practical helpmate.

“When first you said that, William,” rejoined his wife, “I really did think there might be a chance of the child’s being recognized and laid claim to. But there seems no likelihood of that. The very advertisements in the newspapers have been stopped, as you yourself heard from Mr. Leggatt, as useless. There must be something wrong, or some one ’ud ha’ stepped forward to acknowledge the bairn.”

“How — something wrong?” asked Ridley rather ruefully; for he knew from experience that when his wife advocated a cause, that cause was the successful one, especially when, as was usual, her arguments were founded on prudential considerations. He did not want, if it

could be helped, to part with the little stranger whom he had taken in among his own offspring, and whose beauty "brightened up," to use his own expression, the lowly dwelling which already harboured three sandy-haired girls and two white-headed boys, legitimate scions of the Ridley stock, and rightful claimants of the household stock of bread-and-butter. It was, indeed, simply a bread-and-butter question with Mrs. Ridley as to whether tiny May should any longer be allowed to share the rations of the family. Her own mind was made up, but she had yet to adapt her train of thought, as she considered, to the masculine mind.

"I mean wrong, Bill," she said slowly, as she looked up from the shirt she was mending, "wrong in the way that all

underhand actions and dark doings are wrong. If folks shun the face of day, rely on it they are not so honest as they'd like to be took to be. This poor bantling, that people say must be a lady's daughter, how comes it that not a living creature cooms forward to say, 'She's of my kith and kin'? It has been noised abroad—the accident has. 'Tis not for want of knowledge somebody's not spoken out. How do we know the mother war a lady at all, for all her smart cleething, and not one of the rambling player-folk?"

"And if she were," demanded Ridley, smoothing out the wrinkles in his broad palm, "is the little innocent, pure as one of God's angels, to be blamed for that?"

"I'm not hinting such a thing, William, nor thinking it," rejoined his wife steadily,

as she went on with her sewing; "on'y there's them as are just as innocent, poor forlorn ones, thrust into yon Union workhouse at Branksbank, without any man or woman to cry 'Shame!' The sins of the fathers, and of the mothers too, do get visited on the babes in this world, and there's Bible warrant that so't should be. Mind, I'm not saying that the Union be the proper place for little May——"

"I should hope not," interjected the porter; "why, she'd never be reared, left to them slatterns of pauper nursewomen, that treat a bairn as they'd treat a bundle o' rags."

"But I do say," pursued Mrs. Ridley, "that she ought to be tended and looked to in a richer household than our poor and struggling one. I can't—no, Bill,

I can't—see our own children stinted for the sake of a stranger ; and the very way she's pampered and made much of fosters discontent, in the long run, among the rest of 'em."

"I'm sure," said the porter almost angrily, "the young ones haven't had a meal shortened for the sake of this bit of a thing. I'd ha' gone without my own victuals first, and indeed——"

"Yes, William, I know you would," interrupted his wife, smiling, while her eyes moistened a little, for she understood her husband's generous wish to take this lost lamb into the family fold, and she knew, too, that if Ridley had brought home unaccustomed dainties for the small guest, unused to the coarse fare and rough ways of the hardy brood amidst whom she was placed, the kindly

fellow had paid for them by the sacrifice of his well-earned beer and beloved pipe of tobacco, luxuries from which she was loth to see him abstain on any grounds whatsoever, and doubly so for what she deemed a merely sentimental scruple. "I know you would," went on Mrs. Ridley resolutely; "but where should we be if the bread-winner falls ill, denying himself that gate for a chit of a child that might, for aught anybody knows, have dropped from the moon? The father of five, and he on porter's pay, can't afford to fill more mouths than those Heaven sends him, and there's no good talking about it, Bill—there must be an end o' this, and soon."

Sorely puzzled was honest Ridley as he walked back to the brick platform and the wheelbarrows and the weighing-

machine, amongst which his working hours were passed. He could not guess, turn where he would, how to dispose of the little stranger within his gates so that she should not be an immediate sufferer by the transfer. He had, as many of the decent poor have, an almost superstitious horror of the gaunt Bastille whither helpless indigence and vicious sloth were pitchforked pell-mell, to fester together, in the neighbouring parish of Branksbank. The sturdy, self-reliant population of that northern county did indeed regard the workhouse and its degraded inmates from a different point of view from that habitual in some purely agricultural shire of the south. It was not often that a miner, or even a ploughman, in those parts, fell so completely into distress as to enter

the hated doors of what Boards of Guardians glibly style the "House." What with something from his club, and something from luckier relatives, and a dole of out-door relief, that last dire necessity was commonly averted, and few but the idle or the dissolute became permanent lodgers in the grim barrack that rose so blankly from the moor.

And if the Union was thought too bad for a crippled collier or rheumatic farm-hind, who could doubt that it was too bad for a soft, delicate atom of humanity like poor little May? "Wouldn't last a three months o't — not she!" soliloquized Ridley, as he thought with dismay of the dreary children's ward, nursery and playground in one, and of the red-eyed hags and sluttish, sharp-tongued wenches, to whose tender care were committed the

helpless host of innocents whose misfortune had brought them to that place.

But then, what was to be done with May, and how was her lot in life to be made easier than that of some deserted brat left at a relieving officer's door by a gang of travelling tinkers? On the principle of natural selection, her chance of existence would be infinitesimally small. The vitality of boys and girls bears no direct ratio, it is true, to their social position, and an infant duke might thrive in the hard apprenticeship which kills off so considerable a proportion of his humbler brethren; but the waif of the railway accident was so slight, frail, and tender that in her case neglect and ill-usage must prove inevitably fatal. There are little ones on whose brows it is written that they would wither in an un-

congenial atmosphere, as a flower dies for lack of water or sunshine ; and May was certainly of these.

“Yet what gentlefolks would take her?” muttered honest Ridley, as he unhooked a couple of the horse-boxes from the segment of a train standing like a few joints separated from the body of a serpent, and helped to push them into a siding. “She’d do them no discredit, I’d go bail ; but who’s to take her ?”

That was a question easier to ask than to answer. With the exception of the rectory, there was but one gentleman’s house within a short distance—the house of Sir Thomas Shafto, whose park gates were but a mile distant from Capel-le-Moors. But Sir Thomas, and his wife Lady Elizabeth, and his son and heir

Master Percy, were away in what was vaguely designated as "foreign parts;" nor was there any probability that these, the great people of the neighbourhood, would have welcomed a nameless little castaway within their stately doors.

All that rainy, lowering afternoon, the thought of little May hung like a cloud upon the porter's mind, but no satisfactory solution of the difficulty presented itself until, as the hour came when it was time to lock up the door of the booking-office for a space, and to trudge towards home and tea, Ridley heard his name called, and looking round, saw that the person who had accosted him was a tall, thin, elderly man, dressed in a well-brushed suit of black.

"Can I do anything for you, Mr. Gwynn?" asked the porter, adding as

an afterthought, "not that there's any parcel there"—jerking his thumb towards the office—"to-day, there bain't." For Reuben Gwynn, certificated schoolmaster of the village, occasionally received small packets of books from the cathedral town.

"It wasn't on that account I spoke, Mr. Ridley," returned the schoolmaster somewhat awkwardly, "not at all. The fact is, I've been to your house, and came up here to meet you on your way home."

"No, have you?" said Ridley civilly, but evidently without a conception of the other's drift.

"Yes," said the schoolmaster, nervously twitching, as was his wont when agitated, at the left sleeve of his thread-bare coat, "because there is something

on my mind, and—I have had a talk with Mrs. Ridley, I may mention,” he added abruptly, interrupting himself, “and your good wife, I am glad to find, thinks it would be best for the child, if you don’t object.”

“That what would be best for the child?” demanded the porter wonderingly; and then, as he looked up at the kind, quaint face of his neighbour, the gentle grey eyes, the high forehead fringed with thin and grizzled hair, and the well-shaped but tremulous mouth, he began for the first time to guess what Mr. Gwynn meant. “Why, schoolmaster,” he said, in his surprise for the moment forgetting the respectful mode of address which the other’s reputed learning and blameless character extorted from even the roughest in Capel-le-Moors, “do ye

mean ye'd take the bairnie home—take her for good and all ? ”

“ Ay, Mr. Ridley, I would,” answered the teacher earnestly ; “ take her home to eat of my bread and drink of my cup, and be unto me, if it please Heaven to spare her young life and my old one, as a daughter. My heart bleeds for the poor lamb, left desolate by the wayside ; and since you have your own family to maintain, and I am a lone man, and have enough, as you know, to spare something for the needs of another, why—— ”

“ Well, that beats belief ! ” interjected Ridley, kicking a pebble out of the path. “ You're a good man, Mr. Gwynn, and the school-house, with garden and all, would be a fitter home for the bit lassie than a stived-up cottage like mine, even

if I could afford it, which, not to mince the matter, I just can't. But what does Dame Thwaites say?"

This last query was put with some seriousness, for the middle-aged widow in question managed the schoolmaster's domestic arrangements, and the house-keeper of a meek-tempered, studious recluse is seldom likely to be without a voice in so important a matter as the adoption of a child by her employer. But it appeared that Dame Thwaites, on the subject of May's induction into the schoolmaster's residence having been broached, somewhat timidly, by Mr. Gwynn, had entered with unhoped-for cordialty into the project, and had even gone so far as to accompany the schoolmaster to the porter's cottage, there to assure Mrs. Ridley of her own ability

and willingness to "fettle up" the tiny stray as became a little lady.

The women of both households being thus propitious, May was transferred on the ensuing day to the care of her new protector.





CHAPTER IV.

PAUL KNOX.

“**C**OOM away, lad, coom along of us! All the Old Romans’ and all us club chaps, ull be over at Easeborough to-day, I tell ’ee, and a pretty bit of fist-play you’ll see there. I’ve put a pound myself on Shields Jem, and if he wins the match, it will trouble old Daddy Allen, of the ‘Good Intent,’ to draw beer enough to drink the champion’s health in.”

“And we’ll hev a jolly time o’t,” put

in the second of the two young colliers—big-boned striplings, with washed faces, and pink silk neckties, and fancy waistcoats of brilliant blue, and billycock hats, adorned with gay ribbons, but otherwise attired in glossy black broadcloth.

The third miner, who was somewhat younger, and a head taller than his two comrades, also wore black broadcloth, a blue waistcoat, a billycock hat, and a pink silk necktie; and indeed, had Capelle-Moors been passed under review on that fine Sunday morning, a considerable number of cerulean vests and roseate cravats, worn by members of the same club, and purchased at the same slop-shop, would have been observed.

“I doan’t just know,” said the third of these young men slowly, “about

ganging over to yon prize-fight at Easeborough to-day. If it had been o' Monday, I would."

"Oh! Dick has turned Methody!" returned one of the others, with a coarse laugh; "he's given up all liking for fun since he got so thick with Paul Knox. A man spoiled, I call it."

"No, I hev'n't turned Methody, as ye call it," replied Dick, flushing scarlet to the roots of his fair hair, "nor yet I hev'n't given up fun; and as for a chap being spoiled along of hearkening to our Paul Knox, I'd like to see thee, Tom, try to wrestle a fall with him, though thou'rt eighteen months older than he. Why, when those Irish from the iron-works set on a lot of us last harvest, 'twas Paul saved thee from a broken head. Ye didn't doubt he was man

enough then to be worth his salt, I reckon."

"Nay, nay," rejoined the first speaker, more smoothly; "Tom nor me wouldn't say a word agin Paul; he's a strong chap, and a main good one, on'y ye see"—this was more argumentative as to its tone—"what suits him mayn't quite suit all of us, and I do say a young fellow wants his diversion while he *is* young. And it ain't a prize-fight, over at the public. They'll hev the gloves on—mere sparring, after all. But the Brighton Doctor against Shields Jem! 'Twill be worth seeing, though 'tis Sunday."

"So 'twill," said the lately indignant Dick, now much mollified, and glancing rather ruefully up at the clear sky and the dancing sunshine. "But then I

promised Paul I'd look in at chapel to-day; he's going to speak, lecture they call it, after sermon-time."

The more oratorical of the pleasure-seekers repressed, with a warning kick from his heavy boot, an incipient guffaw on the part of his companion, and with glib assurance resumed—

"They do say the Doctor's cruel good at a rally, but I stand up for Jem, seeing I won three crowns backing him when he boxed with Gipsy Sam—North and South, ye know. And we had best be moving, since Dick's going to desert his mates. Why, he could see the set-to, and get back, if he liked, time enough to hear Paul."

The countenance of Dick during this last speech would have been a study for an artist—regretfulness, longing, and

that sheep-faced sense of shame which the young feel so keenly when public opinion sets against them, all struggling for expression. But at the suggestion that it was possible to unite pleasure and duty, Dick's irresolution vanished, and, comforting his conscience by an inward determination to return to Capel in time, at latest, for his earnest friend's afternoon lecture, he trudged briskly off beside the tempters, and joined the various groups that already dotted the Easeborough road.

There were, indeed, two parties, if not three, among the miners of that neighbourhood, not by any means in active opposition to one another, but as far apart in principle and practice as light and darkness. Those who lived in what may be called a condition of contented

barbarism were numerous enough, and conspicuous enough to be regarded as the true types of the northern collier. There were many to whom an overplenteous diet, frequent holidays, and the indulgence of any passing caprice seemed the climax of earthly aspirations. Earning much and saving little, the average pitman hardly knew what to do with his loose cash and his leisure. That the husband should spend the wages as well as work for them was an axiom of Capel-le-Moors ethics, and few dreamed of any further provision for what is metaphorically styled a rainy day, than the contributing to some friendly society more or less rotten at the root.

Gossip-mongers in those quiet towns which were near, but not of, the rich colliery districts, were accustomed to

wax eloquent concerning the wanton extravagance of the grimy giants who plied their picks a few miles farther north.

“Exactly,” said wrathful half-pay officers to a sympathetic chorus of needy spinsters and pinched widows, who found it sadly hard to make both ends of their meagre incomes meet at the year’s end, “exactly like so many Californian gold-diggers. Drink champagne by the bucketful. Order fashionable clothes from West-end tailors. Live like aldermen. Ay, and keep hunters too, some of them, and hounds as well. And as for green peas in April, and early asparagus, and Severn salmon at the opening of the fishery, why, nobody else, ma’am, in these dear times, has a chance of such tit-bits.”

These sweeping charges of prodigality, exaggerated as they were, covered a substratum of truth. Now and then, at the commencement of one of those drinking bouts, which were the curse of the country-side, some ambitious young miners would try the flavour of public-house champagne. They did not like the champagne, and would have preferred honest malt and hops, but they called for it as a sort of protest against aristocratic exclusiveness. When rare dainties appeared in the shop-windows of market-towns, it certainly was the case that they were "snapped up," as the phrase runs, by colliers flush of money. The hunters were mythical, but a few choice spirits did club together to maintain a scratch pack of some nine couple of mangy harriers, while coursing

was yet more popular, many pitmen not merely keeping greyhounds that they valued as an Arab prizes his horse, but subscribing towards the rent of a moor whereon their favourite sport might be exercised. Ratting, pugilism, sparrow-shooting from the trap, badger-baiting, dog-fights, and, on a small scale, cock-fighting, were the cherished amusements of another set. And few were aware that a percentage of the miners were painstaking naturalists, patient florists, meek students of history and philosophy, or blameless lovers of music for its own sake.

Of the third, or so-called religious section of the collier community, few were more prominent than a certain gaunt, large-limbed young pitman, named Paul Knox. His father and his grandsire

had, in their day, been esteemed shining lights among the little band of God-fearing workmen, whose sober, pious lives were a protest against the gross variety of epicureanism that prevailed among their comrades; yet it was not for their sake, but his own, that Paul's name stood so high in the esteem of his seniors. Young as he was, he was earning man's wages; was the sole support of a deformed sister, left, like himself, at an early age an orphan; and had given proof, while still a lad, of a remarkable vigour alike of mind and body.

It said much for Paul's sound sense and warm heart that his religious sentiments, which were deep and abiding, had not, as is not seldom the case, rendered him bitter and narrow in his dealings with those who thought not as he

thought, who could scarcely be said to think at all—simple materialists, who had never taken the trouble to shape their practice into any sort of plausible theory.

And it was partly because the young miner was a link between saints and sinners, between professing Christians and those who never crossed the threshold of a place of worship, that Paul Knox was prized so highly by elders and ministers of his own communion. All, except a few of the worst among the colliers, had a liking and respect for the bold, patient youth, of whose good nature and ready wit many a tale was current, and who possessed the rare knack of conciliating even a reprobate.

As he plodded, on that brilliant Sunday morning, along the leaden-tinted horse-

way of the village main street, the metalling of which consisted as much of pulverized scoriæ as of crumbled granite, he saw sundry groups of gaily-attired young men and women setting laughingly off, heedless of the clang of church bells, for Easeborough and the sparring-match. And he was able to smile, in his grave way, where another and equally sincere member of his sect might have sighed or scowled.

“They won’t take so much harm there as they might ha’ done elsewhere!” was his muttered reflection. “’Tain’t like seeing a helpless dumb thing put to pain.”

Whereupon he turned into a side lane that led towards the railway line, and presently, after knocking at the half-open door of a dilapidated cottage, went in.

An old woman, the solitary occupant of the house-place, sat crooning and rocking herself to and fro, in a battered arm-chair, before the fire. She had her apron flung over her head, perhaps the last expression of feminine misery, and had paid no sort of attention to Paul's knock, or to the young man's heavy step on the uneven brickwork of the damp floor.

"Don't ask me to do it," she said, in a smothered tone of dogged and resentful defiance; "don't ask me, for I won't. I've had a place o' my own overlong, to go into the House now. If you won't give the loaves and the shillings, why——" Here she started, having probably, by a sidelong peep from amid the dingy recesses of her apron, ascertained her mistake. "I thought

'twere Mr. Eaves, the relieving officer, as he calls hisself," she muttered apologetically; "I didn't know, lad, 'twere thou."

"And does he wish thee, Dame Gubbins, to go into the House?" asked the young miner gently.

The pointsman's mother, for it was she, allowed the apron which she had hitherto worn over her wrinkled face, like the veil of a Turkish odalisque, to drop, only retaining in her lean hand one corner of it, and took a steady stare at the visitor. There are men, and possibly a larger number of women, whose dull and resentful natures prompt them to stare, when in adversity, at those who accost them, precisely with the stolid ferocity of an over-driven ox that cannot quite make up its bovine mind whether

or not to toss and gore the human spectator of its sufferings.

"What's that to thee?" she said savagely; but in a moment more she added, in a different tone, "Noa, I didn't ought to say it. Ye mean kindly, lad, or ye'd not coom to see a lone old wife like me."

"It must be lonesome for thee, dame, now Joe's away," rejoined Paul, with no obtrusive compassion in the ring of his deep musical voice, but still in an accent that gave a quiet assurance of sympathy.

"I thank 'ee, Paul! I thank 'ee!" moaned out the old woman, rocking herself to and fro, with red eyes fixed on the fire. "'Tis lone, the house, and sad, and silent; not that my Joe, poor fellow, ever did much to brighten o't; but I

never thought to miss him as I do now. And he's in gaol, to punish him for what? for being flesh and blood, I suppose, and sleepin' when he war fagged and worn down, like a clock in want o' winding. And there's bare walls, and a bare cupboard; and that Eaves he wants me to come into the Union, he says, when others, that deserve it less, get their three-and-six, and their three loaves, and——" She fairly broke down, sobbing. An ugly, a morose, and perhaps not absolutely a trustworthy-looking old female was Martha Gubbins; but there was a pathos in the very reality of her unhappiness. Paul was not old enough, or hard enough, to remain unaffected by a woman's tears, even when they fell from such bleared eyes as those of Joe the pointsman's mother. He uttered some

well-meant words of attempted consolation, on hearing which, Mrs. Gubbins, as is the custom of her sex, sobbed the louder. At last curiosity effected what mere sympathy could not, and the old woman made use of the corner of her apron to dry her eyes, saying, "What brought ye here, Paul Knox? 'Twarn't on'y to bid me good day, as if we war neighbours, and you biding at one end o' the town-street and us at the other."

"I came partly for that," returned the young pitman, "and partly for something else. I want you, dame, to make one among us at chapel this afternoon."

It was a noticeable feature with this stripling, whose opportunities of learning had probably been no greater than those of others, that he could at times speak perfectly pure and grammatical English,

although the rough Doric of his north-country dialect came the more readily to his tongue.

Mrs. Gubbins made a wry face. "Me go among the Methodies!" she said tartly. "And what for should I gang?"

"Nay, dame, it can do thee no harm, anyhow," returned Paul, with that weighty gentleness of manner to which few could remain insensible. "Not that our people are Methodists, though sometimes so called in error; but, at any rate, 'twill be less lonesome for thee than staying here, to be for awhile one of a congregation humbling their hearts before God. And ye'll meet with those who'll be as sorry for the evil fortune that has befallen thee as any in Capel, whether they go to church or chapel, or mebbe to neither."

“My master, he made a mock at they sort o’ folks,” said the unwilling Mrs. Gubbins. “It war after he died, and me fresh left a widow, I found out there were good souls among ’em; your own mother, Paul, that’s dead hersel’ now, among the best. and the most neighbourly. Well, lad, if it will pleasure thee aught, I’ll busk me, and coom to meeting, or sermon, or whatever ye call’t, for once.” Having said which, the dame shook her head and pursed up her lips, as though she regretted the concession into which she had weakly allowed herself to be entrapped.

On hearing, however, that Paul’s design was to promote not only her spiritual, but also her bodily welfare, by procuring for her employment suitable to her years and habits, in the way of assisting in

their household duties the wives of certain notables of the "chapel folk," and that his recommendation would carry additional cogency if backed up by her presence as a member of the congregation, Mrs. Gubbins brightened up amazingly. Her theology was of a hazy character, and her practice irregular; but all early prejudice against the ugly red-brick building, that had for its sole exterior decoration a slab of white stone inscribed with the word "Bethesda," or against its frequenters, vanished like snow in the sun. It was the prospect of escape from the detested workhouse that attracted her; and, indeed, she would have pledged herself to attend a Mohammedan mosque, or a Buddhist joss-house, to be free from the degradation of indoor parish relief.

"Hast heard from thy son? The poor fellow must miss his home and his liberty sorely," said Paul, as he turned to go.

"Yes, he wrote," answered the old woman grudgingly. "I never was clever, though, at reading what's wrote. An' then it coomed frae a prison. I never thought son o' mine, though 'twere on'y Joe, 'ud write to me out of a prison. Not that it's the poor lad's fault; but still, 'tis well my master warn't spared to see the day."

Now, Paul had a dim recollection, such as a boy retains of a middle-aged man seen but rarely, of Mr. Gubbins deceased—a round-faced, broad-backed specimen of the Titan cut short, slouching, black-bearded, mighty of muscle, a lamb in temper when sober, noisy and dangerous when his shallow brains were excited by

alcohol. He vaguely remembered, too, to have heard it said that "Dan Gubbins" was a henpecked man, and to have wondered, with a child's simplicity of wondering, how so brawny a foreshortened giant could submit to the pecking of puny cacklers like hens. He smiled now, in his calm, thoughtful way, just as though the dame before him had been a paragon of her sex.

"'Tain't thy son's fault," he said quietly, "if he can't heave a creeve, or addle a piece-work wage in the deep seams, like some of us chaps. He's been mindful o' thee, dame, and a good son, anyhow. The great misfortune his weakness, not his will, caused, cut him to heart more than it cut any man. And it'll go hard, when the law sets him free, if his road can't be made a bit smoother

for him than what he trod afore, when he was a railway pointsman. I make no promise, being poor myself, and winning bread for two of us, Kitty and me, by the stroke of my pick. But if the Lord grant my prayer, Joe shan't lack the means of an honest livelihood."

The old woman stared at him with a dull, half-timid bewilderment, such as sometimes takes temporary possession of a small nature confronted by a great generous heart and a big comprehensive brain. Why should he care for her?—for her, or for her son? She dimly felt, somehow, that his friendship was wholesome to her; yet she said no gracious word, but with a mere "I'll busk me, and to chapel, lad," watched her visitor depart.



CHAPTER V.

AT THE GATE.

“PLENDID settled weather”
—thus ran the printed report
of the agricultural corre-
spondent of a London newspaper—“and
such as, throughout the north of Eng-
land, affords every promise of a bountiful
harvest.”

But that genial sunshine which tanned
the green grass into amber-tinted hay,
and kissed the ripening waves of golden
grain, and beamed golden glory on moor,

and meadow, and wooded height, shed but a sad lustre as it fell on the formal front and high, sullen walls of the county gaol, and on the unfrequented road, largely repaired with slag and cinders, that skirted its dismal precincts. The very sun which caressed the other features of the quaint old town, such as the heavy towers of the cathedral, the darkling river, the houses clinging to the low hill-side, even the tall chimneys that told of traffic and of bustling industry, seemed half ashamed to illumine that ugly lump of solid masonry wherein Society provides strong lodgings for those who break her laws.

The outer gaol-gate opened somewhat stiffly and creakingly, and three figures appeared in the gateway. There could be little doubt as to the calling of one of

these, a stalwart man, in the plain uniform of a prison warder. Calm, patient, and strong, he stood, holding open the gate to give egress to the other two. Both of these were young men, somewhat undersized, and poorly clad. Not visitors to the gaol, certainly. Discharged prisoners rather, set free at the expiration of the allotted sentence, and dressed for the first time since their conviction in their own clothes, instead of the prison livery. The younger and shorter, but also the sturdier of these two, was a mere lad, with heavy jowl, receding forehead, and beady, restless eyes that were as black as sloes, and as shifty as those of a rat. There was something rat-like, too, in the quickness with which he slipped through the open doorway the instant the massy door had turned upon

its unwilling hinges ; but, once outside, the spirit of the departing guest seemed to revive, and he turned, leering, towards the tall janitor who had let him out.

“ Good-bye, Mr. Watson,” he said, with a mocking excess of servile politeness ; “ good-bye, sir. I’d a left you a lock of my hair, and another for the governor, only it’s cropped so blessed short I can’t feel the ends between my fingers. Send it by post later on ; ta ! ta ! ” And with a jeering laugh and a knowing wink, this promising pupil from Britannia’s penal school for bad boys turned away and slouched off along the ill-mended road, not bestowing a glance upon the late companion of his captivity, who now stood, meek and dejected, in the middle of the carriage-way.

Watson the warder did not immedi-

ately re-close the gate. The insolence of the first-mentioned prisoner had not disturbed a muscle of his firm, close-shaven, cast-iron face; nor did his steady eyes even follow the slinking figure as with furtive tread it made its way townwards. A hardened young thief was, to Watson's mind, as much a matter of course as was a yellow primrose to the Peter Bell of the poet. But he did look with a sort of interest at the other discharged prisoner, who was no thief, and the reverse of hardened; for he had pressed his thin, bony hands to his face, and tears ran trickling from between the lean fingers. Now had this young man been a thief, even a penitent thief, he would have met with an overdrawn account in the strictly-kept bank of Mr. Watson's sympathies. But the released man was

no thief, but a mere misdemeanant, and misdemeanants form a species of gaol-bird aristocracy, independently of which there were circumstances which pleaded silently in favour of this individual member of the class.

“Hold up, Gubbins!” said Watson the warder, not softly, for softness and he were not on speaking terms, but with a soldierly good-feeling; “keep up, my lad. You’ve served your time, you have, and have the right now to hold up your head like any other subject of her Majesty;” at which mention, up went Watson’s hand, edgeways, to the rim of his cap, in a manner which proved that he had served the Queen in another way than that which entails the tutelage and supervision of criminals; “so be a man, and put a man’s face on the matter. I

myself have been disposed to be down on my luck at times—once when I was left for dead on the field of battle, once when the ship grounded on a rock coming home by the Red Sea, and once when in the cholera hospital at Lahore there. Any one of those came heavier to pull through than this job of yours.”

Very likely this was true, but then stalwart Robert Watson, with nerves of steel and muscles of iron, was better fitted to cope with misfortune than was weakly Joseph Gubbins. Wherefore poor Joe continued to snivel, even as he slowly withdrew his knuckles from his eyes, and made some lame attempt at thanking his late guardian for his well-intentioned advice.

“That the Company won’t take you on again, I can guess,” began the warder,

but Joe hastily interrupted his speech with—

“Nor I’d not take the Company on again, Mr. Watson, for an employer—no, not for fifty shillings a week I’d not. ’Tis not in any money to make up for having such a mort of lives hanging on a chap’s tired hands and tired eyes. No, sir; what I’ve gone through——” and then sobs choked his voice, and he wept, and was ashamed of weeping, as men are.

Watson the warder, once lance-corporal of Fusiliers, contemplated these tears with a mingled emotion of scorn and dismay, quite characteristic of so case-hardened a veteran. Had he been caliph, or colonel, he would have ordered for Joseph Gubbins a double allowance of rum, and an afternoon’s pack-drill, to bring his

mind into a better frame; but being merely a warder, whose limited authority over the discharged prisoner was at an end, he went in and shut the door.

The liberated captive had his cry out (if such a feminine idiom be permissible), and then crawled away, as miserable an object of undiseased humanity as any on whom the summer sun shone down. Very broken, as to his spirit, was Joseph Gubbins. He was better off than some prisoners are when they come out of prison. He had a home, such as it was. But his mother, his sole relative, had shown him but little of a mother's kindness since she had, in unforgotten years, roughly reproached the feeble boy with being a "weeshy wean, not worth the rearing." He had been tolerated later, as winner of the scanty bread of that

stinted household, but never had he been suffered to feel himself other than the frail, half-muscled creature whom Dame Gubbins, had she been a Spartan matron, would have cheerfully consigned to wolves and crows on the top of Mount Tageton. Women can forgive any fault save weakness in a man.

Joseph the pointsman, having reached the end of the lane, just beyond the shadow of the prison walls, sat down on the high bank that bordered the roadway, and, with bowed head and folded hands, looked and felt the absolute picture of sheer, hopeless distress. A brave good man, a bold bad one, may bear Fortune's arrow-hurts without wincing; but Joe was of softer metal, and the world had dealt hardly with him, and he was very forlorn indeed. There are some of us, of

both sexes, who do indeed set forth on the voyage of life in very rickety, unseaworthy craft, poor creatures that are ill-adapted to bear the buffets of the world's bad weather.

Now, what this poor Joe felt, above the prospect of his mother's peevish reproaches, above the loss of the situation that had yielded him his bread, was the loss of good name consequent on his term of imprisonment. He came of a race well thought of among his horny-handed compeers, a stock of sturdy colliers that had lived honestly by sweat of brow and stroke of pick, never wronging any man of a pennyworth, and never, save for an occasional assault, under the frown of the law. And he was a weakling, a shrimp, a threadpaper; well he remembered his mother's sour words,

and the unthinking jests of his school-mates; and he—he, Joe Gubbins, unable to shoulder his tools and go down the mine for a twelve-hour shift—had been the first of the name to be sent to gaol, and to wear the shameful grey, and be cropped, and preached at, and used as a convict among convicts. True, it was for no crime worse than the sinking of exhausted nature that the poor fellow had found himself in that place; and yet he felt as if the taint of sin clung to him, as if all who looked in his face would, so to speak, see the gaol-leprosy upon him. And so Joseph Gubbins, once a points-man, sat down listlessly on the bank, and felt as though he would do well to hide his weight of cares below the black waters of the gurgling river now far away.

The sparkle of the summer sun, the

lark's gay carol overhead, the sweet scent of the tuft of modest violets, coyly lurking amidst tall spear-grass and broad dock-leaves in the meadow close by, all these wasted their consolation on Joe. The nature of his life had been such as to blunt, not sharpen, his perception of such things. But presently the cindery path crackled beneath a firm, heavy tread, and a man's shadow fell between Joe Gubbins and the sun, and a friendly voice exclaimed—

“Why, it's the very lad I be lookin' for! Joe, my chap, how fares it?”

And Joe, looking up, met the steady gaze and the kindly smile of a tall young fellow, when once seen, not easily to be forgotten.

“Why, whatever brought 'ee here to-day, Paul?” he faltered out.

Now, sheepishness, or what the French call *mauvaise honte*, is so thoroughly a characteristic of Englishmen, that many of the best of us, situated as was the tall young pitman, would have attempted by some elaborate fiction to account for the fact of their presence in that place. But it was a peculiarity of Paul Knox that he told the truth unflinchingly, and as naturally as a bird sings or a stream flows, and so he quietly made answer—

“ I coomed, Joe, that thou might see a friendly face, first of all, on leaving yon gaol—that for one reason ; second, I’d like us to have a chat, thou and I, over what ye’d best do now for a living. Think I’ve somethin’ might do pretty well, that can be had—but ’tis for thee to choose.”

Joe's helpless knuckles went back into Joe's moist eyes, and he began to sob again. Paul was of another mould from that of Warder Watson—brave men both, but of unequal calibre—and he allowed the feeble spasm of tearfulness to spend itself before he said—

“We'll walk back together to Capel, if ye will, Joe, and I'll take thee home to my bit place, and Kate shall give ye supper, if you will, and I'll step around and talk a bit wi' thy mother. Women-folk, ye know, are skeary sometimes when ye coom upon 'em sudden.”

Joseph dried his eyes, but his heart was so full that it was by no slight exercise of will that he kept down the obtrusive tears. He could appreciate keenly enough the delicacy of Paul's offer of hospitality, and the suggestion

that the young pitman should visit Mrs. Gubbins as the harbinger of her son's arrival, thus sparing him, in all probability, certain of those side-stabs and uncomfortable verbal harryings with which some women, not of the noblest type, are inclined to salute the unprosperous. Joe was not himself of a remarkably noble stamp of manhood, but he was, at any rate, far nobler than his mother. His next speech went a great way towards proving it.

"Thou'lt take me into thy house, Paul, and let me break bread wi' thee and thy sister, an' I fresh out of gaol!" and as he spoke he looked back shuddering. "Hast thought, mate, o' what mout be said of it?"

It cost him somewhat to utter this well-meant and unselfish remonstrance,

for he was bashful by nature, and apprehensive of his reception in his native village, and he knew that Paul's countenance would do much towards disposing waverers to regard him with indulgent goodwill, yet he did utter it. And so subtle are the influences of human feeling, that he experienced an under-current of shame at the recollection that he was three years older than Paul, who nevertheless would appear to all eyes in the character of his patron and protector.

"Folks will have their crack," answered the young pitman coolly; "but what the best of 'em will say is that Paul Knox was the first to stretch the hand to an honest fellow that has been made to smart for the fault of others too high, or too oliver, to bear their own heft o' punishment. An' that's about all."

"If I'd been there for thieving," exclaimed Joe, by an involuntary impulse, looking loathingly back at the grim gaol-walls, "would ye have said as much to me then?"

"I—I hope I should," returned Paul slowly, and with some hesitation. "Not just the same, I dare say; nor bid you welcome to hearth and board, perhaps. But I'd not ha' left a neighbour lad in the mire even then, could my poor help avail aught. However, as it is, ye needna shun men's eyes, my chap. Ye've done nout to sully your father's honest name."

After this Joe trudged Capel-wards by his friend's side, with a meek and lamb-like docility, now and then asking a question, half timidly, as to some matter of local news, or listening with attention

and apparent gratitude to Paul's projects for his welfare, but saying nothing in the way of positive thanks, perhaps the thing of all others that comes the hardest to an Englishman of any degree. But as the landscape grew familiar, and known landmarks and known faces appeared, Joe seemed unconsciously to press the closer to the side of his strong, calm companion, as if to borrow strength and calmness from him. And thus the scapegoat of the railway company returned home.





CHAPTER VI.

EARLY MEMORIES.



QUAINT, ill-matched pair of buildings were the two school-houses of Capel-le-Moors ; one—the boys'—of stone that was already grey with moss and golden with lichens ; one—the girls'—of new red brickwork. Mr. Gwynn's little dwelling, built of stone and roofed with slate, adjoined the first-mentioned of these, and had attached to it a garden full of fragrant, humble, homely flowers, the sweet scent of which mounted in the pleasant summer morn-

ings to the little window, draped by a blossoming creeper, of May's tiny chamber. May had thriven, thereby falsifying the croaking prediction of sundry sagacious crones who, as they puffed at their black tobacco-pipes, were wont to declare that "The young bit o' a lass would na be long to follow her mother, not she. A bairnie of that age, and a leddy born, could na grow up beside old Gwynn's lonely hearthstane."

That May was "a lady born" was indeed an article of faith at Capel-le-Moors. Dame Thwaites, the schoolmaster's mature housekeeper, had in her that dormant motherliness from which good women are seldom exempt, but which was first awakened by the notion that her young charge was of gentle blood.

"I be a Borderer myself," she was fond of saying to the large-eyed, wondering child, who was her most attentive listener—"a Borderer myself, and come from the Wall. And *my* mother was a housekeeper, too, but in a different guess sort of place—at Sqrueby Castle, where kings and queens have lodged, and where the lord o' the manor could gather five hundred horse when the Percy called the gentles to war against the rough-footed Scots."

It was a labour of love, as years went on, for the old schoolmaster, in his hours of leisure, to teach this bright, shy, willing pupil, so utterly unlike the dogged urchins with whom he had officially to deal. He was a well-read man, this Reuben Gwynn; and, thanks to his care, May came to possess a smattering of

modern languages—French, German, and Italian—a lore which, to the rugged folks around her, seemed almost portentous. Of her own history the motherless child had gradually gleaned the little there was to know. Often, as the shadows of evening fell, she had gazed, with a sort of awed curiosity, on the now silent school-house, where once had lain in dismal array the dead slain by rending iron, and devouring flames, and scalding steam. She knew, too, certain turfen mounds in the churchyard, beneath one of which slept her nameless mother.

Once or twice there had been pointed out to May the lean, shambling figure of a young man in workman's garb, of whom Dame Thwaites, jerking her fore-finger towards him as though she had been a sorceress devoting him to the powers of evil, said tartly—

“ That’s he that did it—leastways, that bore the wyte o’ the blame, poor chap ! ” And May looked with a timid wonder that was dashed with pity after the awkward, downcast fellow, who had once been a railway pointsman, and bore the name of Joseph Gubbins. The child knew, too, the very spot where the piled-up carriages and the overthrown steam-dragon had been hurled from the rails, and which in local parlance was still designated as “ Bloody Field.”

South-east of Capel, and therefore all but opposite to the sunset, there appeared as night fell a sullen red glow, mantling the low horizon. This, May was told, arose from the Fiery Pit, with the additional information that it had been burning, burning, for years, and that not all the waters of the Tyne could avail to

quench the fire that the opening of a single Davy lamp had kindled. But there were pleasanter memories than these, connected with frequent visits to Capel Rectory, a handsome house enough. Mrs. Churton was very gracious to tiny May, stroking her golden hair with soft, jewelled fingers, choosing for her the biggest of the ruby-red strawberries, and even pushing her condescension so far as to open the piano on her little friend's account, and to play and sing for her pleasure, when she found out that May loved music.

Mrs. Churton—the Hon. Mrs. Churton—was one of those married women who seem at the first glimpse endowed with every earthly blessing, yet who are, at best, only half happy. She was the daughter of a peer; and had been a

beauty, and she had married Mr. Churton for love, and had discovered afterwards that though she understood his character he had never comprehended hers. He was a good husband, an excellent husband, and she loved him still, and they were well-to-do, and their children were healthy and dutiful; but there was not much zest in the life of Albinia Churton.

It suited Mrs. Churton's fancy to make a pet of May, who was so pretty, and sweet, and winning, and whose delight in music was of itself sufficient to endear her to the accomplished mistress of the rectory. And she would have made the little girl a far more frequent guest at her house but for a protest on the part of the Reverend Robert.

"Once in a way is all very well," he said, peering over the upper edge of his

Morning Post; "but don't overdo it, Albinia. You'll spoil the child if you fill her head with ideas unsuited to her station."

"But we don't know, Robert, what her station is," had been Mrs. Churton's mild rejoinder: after which, however, invitations to the rectory were more sparingly given than before.





CHAPTER VII.

THE "OLD DEEPS."

HERE was, at the cross-roads to the north-west of Capel-le-Moors, a sturdy guide-post, bearing the half-effaced indication, "To Cold Harbour, Old Deeps, Madesly, and Threephram Cross."

A few old miners at Capel knew the history of the Old Deeps coal-pit, and would tell it over their pipes and beer. It was a "drowned mine," useless since that miserable day when, at a frightful

depth below the surface, water had broken in, and men, women, and children—for this was in the old time, when legislation was not, and when both sexes and all ages went down to earn a crust in the blackness of the pit—had perished like rats in a hole.



It was a still, mellow afternoon in early autumn, one of those days when the crisp, new-cut stubble is yet as golden as so much honeycomb, and oak-leaves redden, and pheasants rise whirring from the coppice, when May Gwynn found herself alone in the dusty lane—the nut-boughs almost forming an arch overhead—going slowly towards the brown moor where lay the Old Deeps shaft. She had been left to spend the day at a neighbouring farmhouse, and the goodwife had sent the children out to play together,

and, as they straggled across the meadows, May, who was the youngest of the party, had been left behind.

Presently, following the grass-grown track that seamed, like a green riband, the russet surface of the moor, she came to a thicket of birch and hazel, and beyond, to a very jungle of tall fern, and broom, and brambles, and long rushy grass. There were flowers, too, as well as blackberries, and May had gathered a bunch of azure harebells before she reached a point at which she stopped wondering. Before her—full in front—lay something like the hollow of an enormous bowl, so draped, screened, and covered over with twining tendrils and long coarse herbage, as to be indistinctly seen.

May, like a little careless mouse, too

young to dread the ways of men and cats, went nearer and nearer to the trap, lured on by the ripe, tempting blackberries. How big, and how black—big and black, almost, as the mulberries in the rectory garden—was the cluster on that stout, arching spine of bramble, that was just within reach of her little arm ! She bent forward, and the treacherous turf beneath her feet gave way, and with a cry she fell, but not far, for the brambles caught her, and bore her up, swaying and swinging over the gaping mouth of the mine.

Then May knew her danger, knew it as well as a grown woman could have known it, for death is a contingency easily comprehended by a child that once has learned the one grim truth that confronts us at the threshold of existence. Yes, it came back to her now, the unregarded

warning of her nurse, uttered months and months ago, as to the need for being careful on the moors. True, she had never seen a pit save with machinery rattling, steam hissing, carts and men in motion, around it; but now she was quite well aware, as the stout brambles quivered and bent, and she caught glimpses of the darksome void over which they made a sort of bridge, that she was within a finger's breadth of destruction.

The child was frightened, and cried aloud. Then, as no succour came, she was more terrified than before, and her heart fluttered, like that of a new-caught bird, and her eyes dilated as they looked down into the hungry blackness of the terrible abyss below. But even then she did not faint for fear, as many a woman,

and some men, in face of ghastly peril such as this, would have done. Children do not swoon, at least on account of alarm, and after awhile she became, as it was the privilege of her age to do, less frightened. Not that she entertained the slightest hope of escape or of rescue. Of course she should fall. Of course she should be killed. But, that ugly postulate once granted, the innocent little maiden did not so bitterly feel the coming wrench of dissolution as some of us, world-worn and world-hardened, would in such a plight have done.

She thought of her kind friends at home; of the schoolmaster; of Dame Thwaites; of Mrs. Churton, her patroness; of Neptune, the big Newfoundland dog at the rectory, that had been very gracious to her; and thought, childishly, how very

sorry they would all be. Then she pitied herself, but not much, and not at all for dying, but because she was going to be hurt. Would it hurt her so much, so very, very much? No. God was good. He would spare her any great pain. She was hardly at all afraid, now, only certain that death was imminently near. She said her little simple prayers, the same she had lisped on her knees beside her tiny white bed ever since she had been taught to pray, and then shut her eyes, not to see the yawning, hideous gulf over which she swung, and waited to die.

May's first cry, however, in falling, had been heard, and had not fallen on regardless ears, for now the bushes crashed and quivered beneath the force of a strong man's passage, and a tall form stood, with flushed face and hands torn

by the brambles, on the verge of the shaft.

"Some poor soul——" said the newcomer aloud. "What's that? A lamb caught in the—— Ah, Lord grant me strength to save her!" he exclaimed, as his steady brain reeled at the first glimpse of the true horror of the situation.

Yet, had a rescuer been to be chosen out of all that north-country shire, never lacking in manhood, could there well have been a better found than Paul Knox, for all his youth? Stripling though he was in years, the tall young pitman was famed for his strength and activity, while of his courage, he had, reluctantly, given sufficient proof when forced into a brawl. He was about to give another proof of it now. After the first shock and start his strong brain

recovered its clearness, and he comprehended both the extreme danger of May, and the great difficulty of saving her.

The nearest mine was Black Dog pit, over a mile away. The nearest farm was at not quite a mile's distance. To go to either, and to return with men and ropes, would involve a fatal delay. For already the bramble-vines, the strong thorns of which, clinging to the child's frock, bore her up, showed tremulous signs of giving way, and should they once part company, down, down, she must go to her sullen tomb below the black waters at the bottom of the flooded mine. She was about seven feet below the brim of the pit-mouth, far beyond the reach of the longest arm, should even a man risk the bending over the dizzy verge of the shaft. Yet save her he must, and unaided. His

quick eye noted the stout stem of a hazel-tree that grew within a stride of the shaft. That would bear his weight, had he but a cord to fasten to it.

Hastily, but yet with a dexterity that would at another time have astonished himself, he began to make a rope of withes, tearing down tough branches of the willow, and rowan-sprays, and hazel-bark, and twisting them together, along with thorny bramble-stems that tore his fingers, but he felt no pain, only working, dragging, at the pliant strips and stems, to get his rude cord completed. He was urged on by the sight of the golden curls and dainty little form poised below him. The sweet face was not to be seen, but he knew well enough whom it was that he was trying to save. He would have done as much—brave Paul!—for the

dirtiest and ugliest brat in that colliery district, but beauty and grace do assert themselves, even in very early youth, and it did seem too horrible that May should——

Ha! what was that? The strong young pitman shivered like an aspen-leaf as he heard a far-off, sullen plunge into the black water at the bottom of the shaft. But it was only caused by a large flint-stone which his foot had dislodged from its earthy bed, and which had dropped arrow-straight into the unsunned depths below. He made fast, tying it for extra security with his neckerchief, his rude rope to the stout bole of the hazel, and then, boldly but cautiously, swung himself clear of the brim of the pit. He had calculated the distance well, for with his left hand he grasped the sinking child,

and drew her towards him. May gave a little cry, and partially turned her head, and saw Paul, and knew him, for Paul Knox, though his opinions did not always coincide with those of Mr. Gwynn, was one of the few miners who were welcome at the schoolmaster's house. And then, oddly enough, the little heroine, who in despair had been so dauntlessly resigned, began to tremble, and sob, and cry—

“Oh, take me home! Please take me home!”

It was a moment of deadly peril. The withe rope groaned and creaked; at any moment some section of it might give way. There the young man hung, by one hand, as with the other he supported the child, over the fatal pit. Even his sinews could not long endure such a strain, nor his cool brain remain steady in a position so horrible.

“Put thy arms round my neck, dear,” he said, gasping ; “round my neck, I say. So—that’s my good child. Now, my lassie, hold on, hold by me, for I need both hands to climb. Dinna thee be frightened, my dove ! Trust me—trust God ! In His great mercy we shall both come alive out of the pit.”

And by a marvel of skill and strength, the improvised rope cracking ominously as he went up it, hand-over-hand, the young miner contrived to get a grip of the hazel-tree to which the cord was fastened, and in a moment more he stood, panting and breathless, but unhurt, on the solid earth above, with the rescued child in his arms. He put May gently on her feet, and then knelt down and covered his face with his muscular hands, all torn and bleeding, and prayed silently for a while.

"'Twas well, my dear," he said, as, with May's little hand in his, he trudged towards Black Dog colliery, "'twas well a man should have been coming home along Threepham Road, and heard thee cry out when first ye fell over the pit-brink. And perhaps 'twere well that I was the man. Not that another would not ha' done as much," Paul made haste to add, "but 'tis Monday, and a good many wouldna ha' been sober."

It being Monday, there were scanty signs of labour visible on the outskirts of Black Dog pit, where, however, the engine was at work; while from his cabin, at Paul Knox's call, came forth Joseph Gubbins, now under-tenter, or sub-custodian, of that machine. The ex-pointsman winced and looked guilty as he recognized the child. It was four years ago

that the Capel accident had taken place, but his memory kept it green and fresh.

“Why, Paul, lad, whatever——” said Joseph, as he looked from the child to the man, and noted the pallor of the one and the bleeding fingers of the other.

“She got playing away from the others,” was Paul’s simple explanation, “and was most lost, but for the Lord’s goodness and my help, in Old Deeps pit. They ought to mend up that fence, indeed! What I want is a lift in a cart, if there’s one at bank, for the little one’s too shaken like to walk all the way to Capel.”

There were two or three carts at bank that day, ready, in a leisurely fashion, to remove coal for transport to Newcastle or London. And a good-natured driver was easily persuaded to tilt out the ton or so

of coal that he had already taken in, and to convey the little girl and her preserver to Capel-le-Moors, where May was rendered up, safe and sound, to the care of her protectors. Neither to Nurse Thwaites, nor to Reuben Gwynn the schoolmaster, did Paul Knox take to himself any peculiar praise for the gallant rescue that he had done, nor did he dress up May's peril, and her redemption from it, in any strong colours or picturesque adjuncts. Nor did the child thank him. She was too young for that, but she looked shyly after him, as he went on his way, and Paul Knox smiled—that grave, sweet, gentle smile of his, that the suffering knew so well—and nodded, and trudged on.



CHAPTER VIII.

“ARCADES AMBO.”

“**WE** E’LL have freedom, gents, or we’ll die for it. Hard-handed industry shan’t, if I know it, be ground down any more in the flinty mortar, and beneath the adamantine pestle, of the stony-hearted capitalist. You—the horny-fisted sons of labour, who wring the coal, the needful coal, from the bowels of the earth—shall no longer be trampled upon by the rich man’s hoof. Up, and be doing! Show your man-

hood; show your sense; approve yourselves worthy of the name of Britons! These noble lords and right honourable gentlemen who fatten on the products of your honest industry, let them ply pick and spade themselves; let them——"

It is unnecessary to report the oft-repeated harangue at any greater length. Nor could there be any doubt as to the calling of the orator who uttered it, a paid agitator, loud and blatant, who got his bread as trumpeter to the great crusade of discontent. Such men are chosen, or choose themselves, with some little regard to the sphere of their exertions. In the cotton country, or the clothing districts, it is all very well for an undersized, narrow-chested delegate to appeal to his "fellow-workers," albeit he never served a spindle or pieced lost ends of yarn in

his life. But to speak to the brawny wage-earners of the coal and iron industry, to those who know the weight of hammer, and puddling bar, and pick, a stirrer up of the popular mind must be cast, physically, in a different mould. Mr. Cowall—whose address, in a fragmentary shape, begins this chapter—was fairly well adapted by nature for such a task, being a big man with a loud voice and a red face, and limbs that were large enough for very hard labour indeed.

It might be indiscreet to inquire over-curiously into Mr. Cowall's antecedents. That he had been a member of the heavy-weight P. R., and had sold or "squared" a fight, and afterwards lived for six months on the credulous liberality of some serious persons in Islington as a reformed prize-fighter, was confidently

averred. Mock-auctioneer, racing tout, low comedy man at a provincial theatre, singer at a music-hall, and begging letter-writer, he was reputed to have been. Some little cleverness he must have had to back his impudence, but there was about him so much of bragging and bombast that nobody—not himself, perhaps—knew what was real in his pretensions and what was sham. There was no doubt as regarded his inches or his effrontery, or the roar of his deep hoarse voice, and what he said was listened to by the miners with a respectful attention which would not have been granted to the eloquence of wiser men.

Those were troublesome times in that blackest of the so-called Black Countries, whence are drawn the indispensable coals that cook our food and warm our dwell-

ings, and keep alive the throbbing heart which impels our machinery. Coals had been "up," and fuel dear, to the satisfaction of the colliers; and now there was a reaction, and coals were cheap, and wages, according to Adam Smith and Ricardo, should have been lowered too. But it is not in the nature of ignorant humanity to be reasoned out of three-and-sixpence a week, and strikes were threatened, and riots apprehended, and stones thrown at the carriages of such few coal-owners as inhabited the district from which they derived their wealth. And Mr. Cowall, who had an instinct comparable to that of those storm-birds known as Mother Carey's chickens, scented the disturbance from afar off, and came to Capel to nurse and fan the smouldering embers into a flame.

It was not alone the reduction of wages that had fired the blood and aroused the resentment of the miners. Some proprietors of pits had taken advantage of the period of depression to propose certain rules as to piece-work, overtime, the measurement of coal, and so on, which gave deadly offence. The miners were irritated; the clubs, in their corporate character, were wrathful; the fury of the local Union knew no bounds. Hunt Cowall—he professed to owe his baptismal name to a sponsor more famous than himself—came armed with his credentials from some head centre of agitation, and was received with open arms. Hence the meeting, one of a series of meetings, at which the oration, a small part of which has been here set down, was delivered.

"It fell flat, rather," confidentially

remarked Mr. Bunch, the secretary of the local Union, as he walked home with his metropolitan ally at the close of the proceedings. No man likes to be told that his speech has fallen flat, especially if his profession be the making of speeches.

“Whose fault is that, sir?” retorted Mr. Cowall savagely; “mine, I ask you, or that of the willing slaves on whose dull souls are vainly wasted words that burn? You’re sadly behind the age, here, Bunch. In the Potteries, now——”

“It was an open meeting, remember,” soothingly interrupted the secretary; “we are so sure of the Union hands that I didn’t even think it worth my while to have a ‘whip’ for attendance. After all, the non-Union men form the majority, and some of them are not easy to persuade.”

"Who was that tall, sallow, black-haired fellow that got up when I'd finished, to say a few words, as he called it? He spoiled the effect of my best phrases, confound him!" asked the delegate; and on being told that the person in question was Paul Knox, gruffly declared that he had a crow to pick with the said Paul, and did not care who knew it.

"If I were you," timidly rejoined Mr. Bunch, who was a little man, with trim whiskers and a gilt watchguard, "I don't think I would exactly quarrel with the party alluded to—not violently quarrel, I mean. Paul's the best man, bone and sinew, from here to Wearside or Tyne-side. He's quiet-spoken, but it would be as well to let him be."

The large man from London, reddening

very much, boastfully demanded for what Mr. Bunch took him, and expressed his own ability and willingness to dispose of the said Paul in the course of six rounds for fifty pounds a side, but then dismissed the subject as unworthy of him.

“If we were to announce a strike for next week, say,” inquired Mr. Cowall, “how many pits could we shut up?”

“Let me see,” returned the secretary, reckoning on his fingers. “There’s the Old Romans pit—the Old Romans are with us, to a man. And Black Dog, we couldn’t precisely stop the workings there, but we could make it difficult to keep them going at a profit, by calling off our men. Gaff Green, Thrummer’s, and Great Birks stop the day I choose to lift my finger, and Crowder’s and Buskton will follow suit, so sure as my name’s

Bunch. Stonebrigg and Little Birks are doubtful. The railway colliery hands are not to be trusted. But Penaroon, sir, out Threephram way, that's true as steel."

"And Silverseam?" demanded the delegate from London.

"Why, Silverseam, you see, Mr. Cowall," rejoined the secretary, with an apologetic cough, "Silverseam is a mine over which we have never been able to get a proper hold. A very big pit, bigger than the Old Romans, and nigh twice as productive. It belongs to the Marquis, too, and though it may sound ridiculous to you, Mr. Cowall, who are town-bred, some of our folk do make great case of those old families, like my lord's, yet. And there has always been liberal usage there, I don't deny, as to old-age pensions

and 'compensation for bodily injury. Then, some of those that pull off their shirts to go down Silverseam shaft are a studious lot, book-worms and flower-fanciers, and others are the chapel-folk, with Paul Knox——”

“That’s the young chap that contradicted my statements to-night, is it?” interjected the other grimly. “I tell you what it is, sir. There is no hope for freedom’s triumph while a fellow of that sort is allowed to open his mouth against the sacred cause of resistance to oppression. Are there no Union men in the mine, then?”

Mr. Bunch made haste to correct this misapprehension. About a fourth, he said, of the Silverseam hands were entered on the books of the Union. Another fourth could be influenced, less

directly, through the medium of clubs, respectively known as the Blues and the Pinks, to which they belonged. The rest were not readily to be "got at," unless, indeed, they should prove to be infected by the general epidemic of dissatisfaction. It seemed, from what the secretary said, that to be employed in the Silverseam mine was esteemed as in some degree the Blue Ribbon of the working collier's craft, as being equivalent to a certificate of character. There was no doubt but that in case of a turn-out of the Silverseam hands, the wavering miners of other pits would follow the example.

"As luck will have it, the new manager is more hated than ever a butty of the pack," remarked Mr. Bunch, "and that tells for a point in the game. You see, there's many who wouldn't directly like to go against the Marquis——"

"The Marquis!" repeated Mr. Cowall, mouthing out the word with an extreme disgust, and spitting on the ground to emphasize his feelings on the point in question.

"Who would come into a strike, or worse, to vex Butty Bates," pursued his colleague; "and no wonder, for he does ride rough-shod over them with his new-fangled rules, and pretends to know more about the coal-winning than pitmen who have spent their lives underground. He is an aggravator, that chap, and if my lord were not abroad, and his man of business a soft one, that Bates turns round his finger, he'd never be allowed to——"

"Why, you simpleton," again interrupted the London delegate, but this time with twinkling eyes and hilarious good-humour, "can't you see that Mr.

Bates, if that's his name, is our very best friend, and plays into our hands in first-rate fashion? Quite right that they should feel the collar gall their withers a bit, before they kick the whole rattle-trap, shafts, splash-board, driving-seat, and all, to splinters. Here we are at the door of my lodgings. Come in, Mr. Bunch, and take a glass of gin-and-water and a pipe. We'll drink the health of Butty Bates, for rely on it, my good sir, that Silverseam, and nothing else, must be the main point of our attack."

And over the gin-and-water Mr. Cowall and his local ally discussed the coming campaign, and by the time the second tumblers were emptied, had settled upon a plan of operations, the results of which will in the due course of this history be made manifest.



CHAPTER IX.

TROUBLED TIMES.

“**T**HERE shall be an end of this kind of thing—an end of it, I say. For the moment, we have put down their rising with the strong hand, but the snake is only crippled, not killed, and by——”

“Robert, Robert, a clergyman to speak so, and before the girls too!” said Mrs. Churton admonitorily; and the rector gulped down the wrath that rose to his lips, and stood reproved. There was

some excuse for the incumbent of Capel if he had for the moment forgotten his cloth, and the decorum of language and manner which his profession exacted of him. He had been out on horseback, for hours, on the extremely secular errand of authorizing, as a magistrate, a military force to suppress a riotous movement on the part of the miners on strike. For the strike, organized by Messrs. Cowall and Bunch, had taken place; and the Old Romans—as the men who earned their livelihood in the pit which bore that name, and which was said to have been worked when the Emperor Severus held state in York, were called—had been the first to turn out in a body.

A strike, or other insubordinate proceeding, on the part of the Old Romans, was not in itself calculated to produce

any great effect in the mining districts. Pits, like regiments and clubs, get a character, good or bad, which clings long to them. Nobody knows why a set of feather-brained young subalterns should be noted for mad pranks and horse-play because another set of subalterns, in no way akin to them, save by the mystic link of the regimental number, were equally noisy and silly, fifty years before. Why is the taint of gambling inherent in the members of the Queensberry, of which the too famous Earl of March, immortalized as "Old Q," was the founder? Or why should the Old Romans have maintained in Capel-le-Moors a dubious repute, as being noted for excesses in time of peace, for turbulence when strikes were the order of the day?

Certain it was that a ratting-match,

a dog-fight, a cock-fight, the illicit baiting of a bull in the stable-yard of some roadside public-house, the landlord of which knew that his licence would not be renewed, and was reckless, the bribing of two olive-skinned gipsy lads to pound one another to a jelly, found their staunchest patrons among those who laboured in the Old Romans pit. If any collier, in his cups, wagered that he could toss off a bottle of raw rum, and died of it, as the tossers-off of bottles of raw rum commonly do, that collier was sure to be reported as an Old Roman. The great drinking bouts, in which the brains were kept saturated with liquor for several days and nights, barbarous traditions handed down from a pagan ancestry, were excused by many a miner on the ground that, being an Old Roman, he must

follow an ill example, and do as the Romans did.

The Old Romans, as has been said, were the first in the field. They not merely struck, but were the cause of reluctant idleness in others, for at their dictation the men employed in several small pits not enumerated in Mr. Bunch's catalogue came up the shaft and refused to return to their work. The Black Dog pit lost half of the busy human ants that had been wont to make its subterranean galleries resound with the clink of pick and shovel, and the Threepham miners announced that they would not win another ounce of coal until grievances were redressed. With sheep-like gregariousness, the colliers imitated the pattern set them by their comrades, until fires were extinguished, and machinery

silent, throughout a district lately resonant with iron clangour and the panting of the steam-engine. But still Silverseam held out.

It held out—Silverseam—in spite of the personal unpopularity of its managing overseer, Mr. Bates ; in spite, too, of the fiery harangues of Mr. Cowall, and of other and perhaps mightier heroes of debate, who hurried down to Capel that their speeches and their scorn might arouse the sluggish blood of the recalcitrants. Then, as Silverseam seemed to be speech-proof, and even at Black Dog pit some languid labour dragged on its existence, picketing was tried, first by knots of men, and lastly, on the interference of the police, by groups of women. But the homœopathic character of this expedient did not meet the views of Mr.

Cowall and the genuine malcontents, or indeed of any one save the wary Mr. Bunch, who loved to remain, if possible, on the safe side of the legal hedge.

And at length the Old Romans lost patience, and marched in full strength to shut up Black Dog and Silverseam pits. With the first they had an easy task. The half-hearted garrison of Black Dog mine capitulated at the first summons. The fire was put out. Joseph Gubbins, by this time promoted to be tenter-in-chief of the stationary steam-engine, was warned, on penalty of "a shirtful of broken bones," not to light it again. The men, the ponies, the mules, came up the shaft. And then the cage was smashed, the gins, the windlass, the running gear, were wantonly broken to fragments by some half-grown and mischief-loving imps

who followed in the rear of the invading column. The sub-overseer, technically called a "doggy," was pelted and hooted; and the "butty," or manager, narrowly escaped a ducking in a black pond adjacent. Still the mob maintained a tolerably good-humoured equanimity.

There was an end of good-humour, however, when Silverseam was reached, and resistance to the demands of the rioters was enforced by the parading of a dense mass of resolute men, too strong and too many to be lightly meddled with.

"Dogs," whispered Mr. Bunch the secretary in the ear of his more bellicose friend, the delegate from London, "won't eat dogs. To set our chaps to thwack those chaps would be to spoil the broth. Better wait and see."

Nor, indeed, was there any willingness

to engage in pitched battle on either side. A skirmish or two, consisting of hard words and stone-throwing, occurred between the many boys who followed the rioters and the few boys employed in the mine, but the men were as unwilling to fight out the quarrel as were the Cromwellian troopers who escorted Lambert to exchange sword-cuts and pistol-shots with the cavalry commissioned to arrest him.

Then the police came on the ground, and concerning them the rioters had no scruples. The representatives of authority were sorely lapidated, and fled, to return subsequently along with mounted yeomanry and dragoons, led by the Reverend Robert Churton and Sir Anthony Fenwick, mild Sir Thomas Shafto having positively declined to act. What very

often happens in such cases occurred then. The police struggled masterfully to capture the ringleaders of the mob, but were beaten back by thirty-fold odds. The yeomen huddled together, and the regular cavalry endured taunts and stoning with a long-suffering stoicism which no other troops in Europe would have shown, while the officer in command was unwilling to sanction a forward movement, and Sir Anthony slow to back his clerical fellow-justice in ordering one.

"Flesh and blood won't stand this, captain," said a corporal, at last, as he slashed at the grimy hand that clutched his bridle; and without any very clear conception as to who gave the word to charge, a charge was made.

"Give it them with the flat only; no edge or point!" shouted the officer; and

if a few flesh-wounds were inflicted, it was probably by accident; but scores of the mutineers were ridden down, and in most instances with the result of severe contusions, for iron-shod horse-hoofs cut and bruise. Victory remained to the side of law and order, and the Old Romans and their partisans were put to ignominious rout, but by this time a sullen resentment had been aroused amidst the defeated faction.

“If ’twere not their horses and swords, we’d ha’ raddled them!” was the frequently expressed conviction of the rioters on strike, with reference to the affray in which the military had been employed, but they betrayed no desire to resort to the arbitrament of another scuffle. They made no attempt to interfere when four or five conspicuous colliers were taken

into custody. But a dangerous spirit had been awakened amongst them, and the lowering looks and muttered curses of the men, and the shrill fury of the women, made the long straggling street of Capel anything but a pleasant place. Sir Anthony Fenwick rode here and there, giving to all who would listen to him the good advice to let bygones be bygones, and return quietly to work; and the rector said the same, in stronger language; but Baronet and Parson threw away their words upon sturdy, stubborn fellow-creatures, some of whom were smarting under physical injury, and all under the shame and sting of defeat.

The farmers in uniform, as they rode jingling homewards to take off their martial bravery of helmet and sabre, felt more ill at ease than did the dragoons

on their weary march back to barracks. The soldiers knew that they had done their duty, and had done it, considering the rough nature of their warlike trade, with gentleness and magnanimity. Not a leaden ball had they sent back in answer to a flying flint-stone. Carbines and pistols were going back in sling and holster, clean as when they were taken out for service. The officer, with the dread of the newspapers overshadowing his soul, was miserable, but the men had clear consciences. But the yeomen were less happy. A man in military attire, who has done nothing, and knows the reason of his inaction not to be of the noblest category of reasons, is seldom quite on the best of terms with himself. And these north-country farmers were no cravens, only that property was to

them an idol not to be lightly put in peril.

"All very well; but we didn't want another Peterloo job," growled out one of the armed agriculturists to another.

"No, nor to stir up ill blood. Ricks blaze up quick enough of theirsens!" answered the comrade he had spoken to.

Nobody in Capel seemed to owe a serious grudge to the police, or even to the clerical magistrate who had been so active in the suppression of the disturbance. But there was a bitter feeling of resentment against the troopers, and still more against those mine-owners and mine-managers and overseers whose cause the dragoons had championed. Messrs. Cowall and Bunch, whom the chief constable, to Mr. Churton's disgust, had declined to handcuff for transference to the county

gaol, rubbed their hands together and chuckled with exultation, for now the heated wax was malleable enough to take any sort of impression which they might be pleased to stamp upon it.

Mr. Churton, triumphant, should surely have come home in a genial frame of mind. Yet he did not. Perhaps in his secret soul he felt some sense of the incongruity of his spiritual and secular functions, and was not quite sure that to trample down his rebellious flock beneath the steel-shod hoofs of cavalry was the whole duty of a pastor. But that he was in the right, he never doubted for a moment. And, as some people will, he pushed his principles to extreme lengths, and was sincerely sorry and disappointed because the peddling scruples of laymen prevented the application of a thorough

policy of purification. Had he had his own way, bread-and-water, cropped hair, and a cat-of-nine-tails would have awaited Cowall the orator and Bunch the secretary, when marched off to their cells, each at the tail of a troop-horse. "Broken no law!" he had roared out, irascibly; "why, hanging is too good for such skulking firebrands, that let honester fellows bear the brunt of the fray!"

But Mrs. Churton was surprised to find her husband's outspoken censure chiefly reserved for quite another sort of person than Messrs. Bunch and Cowall—for one who had transgressed neither the statute nor the common law, and had indeed kept prudently in the background during the broil, to emerge smirkingly into the light of day so soon as his foes were scattered. "That ass Bates," said

the rector, kicking an unoffending footstool out of his way, "seems determined to set the stack on fire as soon as we have put it out, the fool that he is!"

Mrs. Churton, not unnaturally, asked what "poor Mr. Bates" had done to unloose afresh the waters of strife. Ladies of her mental and bodily habits are apt to sympathize with those against whom mob-violence is directed, and can hardly comprehend the illogical manliness which makes such a one as the rector despise the timorous bully who has goaded his subordinates into revolt, and then shrinks from the storm evoked by a long course of harsh maladministration.

"What has he done?" reiterated the rector; "why, just the very worst for us and himself that lay in his power. Takes this time, of all times in the year, to

dismiss the Union hands working in Silverseam pit, and proclaims publicly that no member of the Colliers' Union shall ever be employed there again, and, as if to push meddling to the highest pitch, that it is 'under consideration,' as he words it—for the fellow talks like an Under-Secretary of State replying to a deputation—whether clubmen shall be permitted any longer to work in the Marquis's pit, and draw the Marquis's pay. He'll have the Pinks and Blues on his shoulders for his pains. I said to him, 'Mr. Bates, you are very much mistaken if you think Englishmen will submit to dictation of this sort. I don't like the Union one bit—think it a pestilent stumbling-block between masters and men, and that the clubs are good for little but ribbons and drink—but this is

a free country, and the men have a right to live as they choose, so long as they let others live.' Some of the strikers heard me, for my voice isn't a very low one, and they set up a cheer. I bade them hold their tongues, and then I appealed to Bates again, but he was obdurate. Our parish will get a bad name."

"What do you mean, Robert dear?" asked Mrs. Churton, in some alarm.

"There'll be violence done, that's all!" replied the rector tersely, and without further remark left the room.





CHAPTER X.

BY THE HONEYSUCKLE HEDGE.

“**H**E’S gone, my dear—clean gone,
and the cage empty. He’s
that cunning, Pecksy is, he
can lift the wicker latch with that beak
of his; and, no doubt, the window being
open, out he went. But he was there
at sundown, when I gave him his feed,
and since he can’t fly, you’ll be sure to
find him, unless some unlucky cat——”

But before Dame Thwaites had time
to conclude her speech, her young

listener had darted from the room, and had hurried out into the garden in quest of her missing pet. May was now a slender young girl of some eleven years old, light of foot, and bright of eye, and with golden hair that glittered in the sunbeams, and fell naturally into soft curls, like the tendrils of a wild vine. Hers was a time of life when a dumb favourite, be it bird, dog, or kitten, is of immense importance in the eyes of its youthful owner, and when the imperious need of something to love seeks a more intelligent object than the stolid prettiness of wax dolls whereon to expend itself.

Pecksy was a pigeon, a lame pigeon, doubly crippled, in fact, since one of his wings, as well as one leg, was partially disabled. There was good reason for his

incapacity to fly or to walk steadily, for Pecksy had made early acquaintance with villainous saltpetre and No. 6 shot, and his first introduction to his young mistress had been in this wise. May and her guardian, the schoolmaster, in the course of a summer holiday's walk, were skirting an enclosed meadow whence came the pop-popping of guns, and the roar of excited men, and occasional outbursts of laughter, and volleys of rude jests at the expense of some clumsy marksman. It was, in short, a collier's pigeon-match that was there going on, enlivened by the clatter of beer-cans provided by the spirited public-house keeper in whose grounds this rough "tournament of doves" was held, while all around the low wall prowled big lads and quick-fingered urchins, ready to pick

up any hurt bird that should fall out of bounds.

As Mr. Gwynn and his adopted daughter went by, the crack, crack of a brace of barrels rang sharply out, and some downy plumes fell, and a loud shout of "Gone!—'cross bounds!—gone!" announced the escape over the top of the low wall of a pretty milk-white pigeon, that dropped, quivering, on the turf. Half a dozen boys rushed up to the scramble for the perquisite, but just as the fingers of the first were closing upon it, the bleeding bird fluttered off, and flew, in a floundering way, almost into May's very arms, and then dropped, exhausted, and no doubt anticipating instant death. May had pity on the wounded bird, and under her care it lived and throve and grew tame, crippled

as it was, and knew its name of Pecksy, and the kind hand that stroked its glossy neck, as well as any other domestic pet could have done. Sometimes, however, the pigeon contrived to slip out without leave of absence, and it was to find the truant before it should encounter some marauding Grimalkin of the neighbourhood, that May had sallied out into the garden through the darkness of a moonless evening in sultry August.

At the further end of the schoolmaster's garden was a high hedge, where honeysuckle had been trained to drape with its blossomed vines the dense blackthorn which composed the solid portion of the fence, and beyond this was a lane, the other side of which was bordered by a scrap of common land, whereon a few geese and a lean donkey or two picked

up a precarious living. It was not by any means a frequented thoroughfare, and as May drew near to it, and espied a white object, which she was confident could be no other than the runaway Pecksy, nestling amidst the long grass, she was surprised to hear from beyond the hedge the sound of two or three voices in earnest conversation.

"I never knowed it fail—a good four-pound tin of gunpowder dropped down the chimney; or, as his is a more genteel sort of a crib, we'd tip him a twelve-pounder," was the first amiable suggestion that reached May's ears.

"Not to be thought of," said another voice, the original north-country accent of which was overlaid, as it were, by a tone of cosmopolitan vulgarity. "It pays, I know, well enough in Sheffield, when

a dry fork-grinder won't obey rules. But, not to put too fine a point on the thing, our folks here wouldn't like it, indeed they'd not, though Bates suffered by it."

"Your folks are nash," snappishly rejoined the first speaker, "too nash they be, by half. How can a job of this sort be got through without soiling of one's fingers, I'd like to be told? Down Brum way we reason the thing out clearer. Is this Bates to be made a warning of? and if not, what am I here at all for?"

"Of course he be to get it, the mean villain!" said another, and a deeper voice, emphatically; "Bunch be right, though. No chucking o' powder down chimneys; weans and wives get killed or maimed that way; and wi' weans and wives we've no quarrel, mate!"

"Hark'ee, master," said — after the pause which had apparently been devoted to consideration—the advocate of gun-powder, "I've got a chap under my hand, or rather a brace of 'em, for they hunt in couples, that 'ud do the trick, neat as ninepence, for you. They're not here, but I could send a message along the wires as would bring them here, per fast train, as bright as beagles. Sloman's a dead shot. Air-gun, rifle, pistol, all come natural to him, and having been a master-glazier, before he met with misfortunes, he casts his own bullets and keeps his own counsel. Jambers can get in mostly everywhere, sees without being seen, and puts the sanguinary police on a sanguinary wrong scent, Jambers does. Their price is four pound ten per man, for Sloman and Jambers, *and* expenses, of course!" concluded the speaker.

“Dear me! dear me!” said, irresolutely, Mr. Bunch, the secretary of the local Union. It was evident that he was waiting to see how the proposition was relished by the third member of the conference.

May also, breathless, with glistening eyes and bent head, listened. She, child as she was, very nearly understood the purport of what she heard. And her reading helped her. She knew that in Venice, and Naples, and Spain there had been such a trade as that of the hireling bravo. That such a putter out of the way of enemies could be, in England, bought for money, was a contingency new and surprising, but perhaps less impossible in her fancy than it would have been in that of many a stipendiary magistrate used to see crime run in its

usual well-worn grooves. So she stood still, with beating heart, listening to hear more. Might she not—even she—be an instrument in God's hand to intervene between the men of blood and their victim?

“Hark thou, my chap!” said, deliberately, the owner of the deep voice; “I doan't know thy name, but Cowall's all right, and Cowall warranted that we might trust 'ee, Bunch and I, to talk over this business. Sooner than see even Butty Bates shot, by a tyke that owed him never a grudge, but did it for his four pound ten, I'd—— Pah! It sickens me. We doan't pay men to settle scores with a man that way in these parts.”

There was no mistaking the genuine character of the speaker's disgust at the cool proposal of his confederate. The

rough miner—as by his dialect he probably was—had most likely never heard of Venetian bravoos or the Sicilian bearers of mercenary stilettoes, but the notion of spilling blood for money was in itself repugnant to his rugged mind.

The patron of Messrs. Sloman and Jambers replied with an oath. “I’m best out o’ this,” he said; “Bates ought to insure his life, it seems to me, you’re that tender with him. I thought I was going to meet men, not a set of white-livered——”

“Keep a civil tongue, mate!” gloomily interrupted the possessor of the deep voice. “When knocks are plenty, mebbe thou won’t crow so crouse, like a cock on his own midden. Ned Foord lacks no Brummagem schooling to larn manhood, my chap, as Bunch here could tell ’ee

if he chose. Bates has hed fair notice, with a coffin drawn on the paper, and all correct; and if he doan't make it up wi' the dismissed hands afore sundown to-morrow, or else throw up his Butty's place, why, we'll see!"

Now this appeared, so far as language went, somewhat a lame and impotent conclusion to the menacing speech, but there was something in the fashion in which the words were ground out between their utterer's teeth, and in the savage stamping of an iron-bound heel upon the earth, that made what was said assume a baleful significance.

The man whose identity seemed to be somehow mixed up with the famous capital of the Midland toy and hardware trade, presently spoke again, and more smoothly than before.

"It would be a pity," he said, in a meditative tone, "if this Bates were to get off scot-free, wouldn't——"

"He shan't, curse him!" broke out the miner, in a sudden access of ferocity. "One chance he's got—to take back the locked-out, afore night, to-morrow. Let him look to't, else, for he'll get a lesson may teach something to every Butty north o' Trent."

"That is his house, I think, with the white front, and the creepin' plants over the verandy, on the London Road," said the other man, with affected innocence. "A nice, snug, quiet place."

"Ay, and nice and near the Tyne Canal!" fiercely responded the pitman; and then there was a whispering, Mr. Bunch taking the lead in this more cautious colloquy, until at last the man

from the Midland Counties said, with a chuckling laugh, "And if he swallows more of the water than is good for him, or can't swim, eh?"

"Many's the pup I've seen drown, with more sorrow to't," pithily rejoined the miner. "Bates, he hev a-ried the patience of us pitmen over-long."

And then there was more whispering.

"Stands for to-morrow night, then, does it?" asked the stranger.

"For to-morrow night," answered smooth Mr. Bunch.

"Mind ye, unless Bates knuckles down. He's hed notice. Let him cry craven, and he may keep a dry skin, and a whole one, for me!" said he of the deep voice. And then the men were heard shuffling off.

May, left alone beside the honeysuckle

hedge, listened to the sound of the retreating footsteps as the hare listens when horse and hounds sweep by her lair in the brown winter fern. She caught up her bird to her breast, but she remained quite insensible to the caressing touch of Pecksy's pink beak upon the soft roundness of her own peach-like cheek. Her large eyes seemed to dilate as they looked out into the darkness of the black night. What was she to do?

The conversation which she had unwittingly overheard was quite sufficiently comprehensible to her, interpreted as it was by the logic of recent facts. That Mr. Bates, whom she only knew by seeing him drive his tall gig down the village street, or by noticing him as, with his family, he occupied what

was called "the Marquis's" pew in church, was odious in the eyes of the colliers, was perfectly well known to her. She knew him, by repute, to be an arrogant, officious man, who actually seemed vain of his unpopularity, and who, as a newcomer in the district, was deaf and blind to the risk he ran in setting himself at variance with the public opinion of the untutored population in whose midst he dwelt. What was May to do?

She understood nearly all that had been said. That a base and wicked conspiracy against the life of a defenceless man was in course of completion she did not, could not, doubt. The word "nash," meaning nice, or delicate, employed by the stranger from the Midland Counties, was indeed enigmatical to the girl's un-

accustomed ear, but she could form a tolerable guess of the speaker's drift. The miner, and Mr. Bunch, following his client's lead, had certainly repudiated the theory and practice of mercenary assassination ; but a direct menace of murderous violence, directed against Bates the obnoxious, had met, apparently, with unanimous approbation. And May knew too much of the determined character of the typical collier, to entertain doubts that this one would be as good (or as bad) as his word.

What was May to do? She shrank, instinctively, from telling all to Mr. Gwynn. Such a proceeding might have seemed the most natural, but even in childhood we choose our confidants, and kind Reuben Gwynn was very unfit for such an office.

“If I tell him,” thought prudent May, “he will be very much shocked and distressed, and will either go to Mr. Bates himself, or to Mr. Churton, as a justice of the peace. And, whatever happens, the collier folks will be angry with him for spying upon them, as they will say. They don’t like him as it is, or understand him, only respect him because he is so gentle and unoffending.”

May was quite right. The general sentiment of the miners towards the schoolmaster was a negative one, which a little gust of popular irritation might readily change into one of active hostility. And it was very uncertain that Reuben Gwynn, at the cost of his neighbours’ hatred, would effect, by his interference, any real good. Mr. Bates, in the plenitude of his self-conceit, would probably

disregard the warning, or, giving credence to it, would apply to the magistrates for protection. But, out of Ireland, the police can scarcely be expected to supply a permanent body-guard for somebody who has the ill-fortune to be abhorred of the mob ; and, one day, the detested manager of the Silverseam pit would certainly find himself helpless in the hands of his triply exasperated enemies. And a chill ran through May's veins as she remembered how very near to Mr. Bates' villa on the London Road the Tyne Canal, big, black, and sluggish, flowed.

To whom, then, should May impart what she had accidentally learned ? She could not feel sure either of the discretion of Dame Thwaites, or of the leaning of that excellent woman's sympathies. The housekeeper had been loud in her denun-

ciation of "that rascal, Bates—the stuck-up Jack-in-office," ever since the riots had clouded the usually serene sky of existence at Capel, and she felt the more bitter against him because his injudicious behaviour was calculated, as she phrased it, to give "the Marquis an ill name," and to drag the reputation of a great house into the mire of envenomed controversy. A scheme for inflicting the penalties of Lynch Law on the object of the popular hate would not seem to Nurse Thwaites so very reprehensible. She would approve of the intention to duck, and would shut her eyes to the design to drown.

Then there arose before the retina of May's mental vision the image of the man best of all fitted to hear what she had to tell. Yes; Paul Knox, of all her

small circle of friends, was the one best adapted to take on his stalwart shoulders the burthen of responsibility that seemed too ponderous for May to bear. With a child's eagerness, she tripped across the garden, unperceived by Dame Thwaites—whose substantial form was dimly visible at the open window above, as she shaded her eyes with her hand, and peered out into the dusk to watch for the return of her nurseling—softly opened the wicket-gate, and, with the bird still in her arms, made her way by the loneliest route she could select to the cottage, standing somewhat apart, and with a scrap of well-kept garden-ground attached to it, where Paul dwelt. Standing on tiptoe, she looked through the lighted window. Yes, there was Kate, Paul's deformed sister, with her curved spine, and sweet wistful

face, and busy hands, that plied the needle and thread at some feminine task of sewing, while her brother, seated in an elbow-chair by the now fireless hearth, read aloud to her from a book that he held open before him.

A painter might have chosen a worse subject for his easel than that afforded by the interior of that humble home, with its scanty furniture, all in brown oak, the neatness with which everything, from the platters and mugs on the shelves to the old gun and the old sabre—relic perhaps of some unforgotten uncle who fought under Lake or Wellington—was arranged, and the marked type presented by the two inmates of the cottage. There was the tall, gaunt young man, almost a giant in strength and stature, but still the same Paul Knox, tender to the suffering, daunt-

less in the front of danger, that we have known him in the earlier pages of this story. He was not comely, but his was a grand, earnest face, swarthy as that of a Spaniard, and with deep-set, flashing eyes, and black hair that hung lankly about his square temples.

The most remarkable feature of Paul's sallow face has yet to be noticed. It was the mouth, perhaps in all faces the most certain index to character. The eyes, as we all know, are hackneyed diplomatists, from the cradle almost, brightening, drooping, or becoming devoid of expression, as may be most convenient. But the mouth is a tell-tale, and when unveiled by beard or moustache, often contradicts the plausible statements telegraphed by the eyes. Paul's mouth was one that told of stern self-discipline—now

so habitual as to have lost the sense of being irksome—the mouth of a strong man, sensitive to all the temptations that beset strong men, but victorious over them, because of the courage and faith that he bore about with him like a talisman.

Kate's face, as she looked up from over her work at Paul, was for the time made beautiful by the trust and love that shone from her wistful eyes. There was something touching in the deep affection between this brother and the ailing sister whom many a miner, not necessarily bad-hearted, would have regarded as a mere clog and burthen on his industry. Kate knew this—knew, too, or thought she knew, that for her sake Paul had remained a bachelor until an age remarkable in that region of high pay and early marriages,

and she worshipped the very ground on which her brother trod. How patient had Paul been with her, when she had been a peevish, half-grown thing, and needed nursing and care that her frail old mother was too feeble to give ! How had he sat beside her for hours, while others were at play, and how had he, the bread-winner, contrived out of the residue of his wages to bring back, now some dainty such as an invalid longs for, now a hot-house flower, or a bright ribbon, for the little sick sister at home !

May looked for awhile, and then tapped gently at the window-pane ; and Paul and Kate both looked round with a start, and saw through the glass the golden curls and the childish face.

“ ’Tis my little May-blossom ! ” said Paul, laying down his book, and hurrying

to admit the visitor; and May, her courage breaking down, fairly hid her face in Kate's lap, and sobbed out, rather than spoke, to Paul, who knelt beside her, what she had to tell. Very grave indeed was Paul's look as the story came to an end.

"Ned Foord, eh?" he said thoughtfully. "We were mates once, before I worked in Silverseam. Pity to see a chap so stout of heart offer himself to do the devil's work on earth! And Bunch. And a stranger from southwards. Well, 'tis time for me to see thee home, May, my dear. They'll be frightened about thee by this, at school-house. Say naught, my love, of what ye've told to Kate and me, and, by the help of the Lord, I may be able to prevent this wickedness."



CHAPTER XI.

A MIDNIGHT RAID.

VIRGINIA Villa was a new, white, small dwelling, detached, as the name implies, and therefore more truly a villa than the twin structures which builders are fond of calling by that designation. It was neat, and somewhat pretty, despite the obtrusively vivid colour of its green-painted verandah, the too-dazzling purity of its spotless stucco, and the blinding sparkle of its plate-glass windows. New as it

was, a handsome American creeper had had time to enlace it in its slender arms, making a brave show of greenery in spring, and of flaming red when autumn lent its mellowing touch. The garden was gay with roses and azaleas, and there was even a miniature conservatory, where the palm, the cactus, and the orange-tree flourished on a small scale.

Such an abode as Virginia Villa would have been beyond the means of an average overseer of a coal-mine, but Mr. George Bates was understood to possess some private fortune, having been in business as a linen-draper before he undertook the management of the Silver-seam pit. And the same rumour which, on his arrival at Capel, announced the nature of his former occupation, declared him to have been, of all linen-drapers, the

most harsh and exacting towards the unfortunate young men and women who handled his bales and served behind his counter. Certainly nothing inconsistent with this report had transpired since Mr. Bates had borne sway over Silverseam, and the subterranean population that earned their bread by extracting the coal from it.

Why Mr. Bates had been chosen to fill his present post, was a riddle to those who smarted under his capricious severity. That he should have deemed himself confident to direct, without previous experience, the working of so important a mine, was perhaps less surprising than that the impression should have been shared by the law-agent who acted as prime minister of the ample estates of which Silverseam formed a

part. The great nobleman, who in Capel was never spoken of save as "the Marquis"—as in certain shires "the Duke" is a title that everybody knows to apply to one especial wearer of strawberry-leaves—was abroad, and left the care of his dominions to his hereditary man of business. And as the hereditary man of business had ideas of his own as to the administration of the princely property of his absentee employer, he had selected Mr. Bates as a new broom capable of making a clean sweep of certain antiquated customs.

Silverseam pit, it has been already mentioned, had been for long years managed on the principles of a benevolent despotism. No collier of bad, or even of dubious, character could find work there. A greater degree of supervision was at-

tempted as to the conduct—when off duty—of the miners than any other pit-owner had ever essayed to practise, and any serious offence against the law was punished by dismissal. But there was a golden side to the shield. Medical aid in sickness; pensions for the superannuated on the one condition of length of service; pensions, too, to those injured or maimed in the labours of what must always remain a dangerous calling, were granted. There were allotment gardens for a few colliers long in “my lord’s” employment, and sundry advantages in the shape of flannel, blankets, fuel, and the payment of school pence for the children.

It was a privilege, too, which even the most reckless of a proverbially reckless class could not but feel at times, that

Silverseam was a pit that, large as it was, enjoyed an almost complete exemption from those accidents that, ever and anon, supply a sensational column to the daily press. No cost had ever been grudged that could keep the mine well ventilated, dry, and free from choke-damp and fire-damp—grim gnomes that lie in wait for the worker underground. Such was the state of things when wages were reduced, working expenses pared down, and Mr. Bates appointed managing overseer, with no mining engineer to warn or thwart him.

Then began a period of discontent. The mere cutting down of their wages the Silverseam men bore with an equanimity that said much for their good sense; they were somewhat in intelligence above the other colliers of the district,

and could be brought to comprehend that, in a moment of commercial depression, labour, as well as capital, must put up with stinted gains. But they bitterly resented the suppression of privileges which they firmly believed, by long usage, to have become theirs by right. Mr. Bates, and the agent whose instrument he was, had not absolutely taken away from the recipients the bounty of their noble master, but they had contrived to surround the enjoyment of it with rules so vexatious, and conditions so onerous, that few or none could hope to be the better for the liberality which had been traditional. Then had come the strike and the riots, and the dismissal of the Union men, which brought matters to a climax.

These Union men were really to be

pitied. They had mustered, like the rest, to repel the threatened onslaught of the Old Romans on Silverseam pit; but they had been, like the mounted farmers, half-hearted in the cause. Opposite to them were arrayed the members of their own association, and, had words given place to blows, their only hope would have been to have exchanged hard knocks with adversaries who, at any rate, did not belong to the Union. Then, when quiet was restored, came Mr. Bates and his lock-out to feed the flame of sedition. There was no need to close Silverseam pit by violence; the mine was silent now, and empty. Not a man would go back to his work until his Unionist comrades were relieved from the unjust interdict under which they lay.

The manager of the Marquis's pit was

jubilant. Why not? Order reigned in Capel, and he was one of those men whose belief in legality amounts to sheer fanaticism, and who, if only they are fortunate enough to have "the law on their side," are, in their own opinion, as invulnerable as Goliath, armed in brazen mail, when confronted by the sling and pebbles of the beardless shepherd-boy. A Londoner too, *pur sang*, born and bred, as he was wont to boast, within the ward of Cheape, he had all the cockney confidence of one who has never seen aldermanic edicts, backed by blue-coated police, disputed by mortal man. So he went to sleep, in the midst of those whom he had capriciously thrown out of work—and they the offspring of those rude Northumbrians whom neither king nor palatine bishop could readily curb!

Mrs. Bates was not quite so mentally comfortable as her lord, and she ventured to hint, once or twice, that the colliers were "a rough set," and to suggest that it might be as well to garrison the trim white house with a policeman. For women believe in the police, and had there been a single constable, complete with bracelet, brass-headed staff, and shiny hat, domiciled beneath the roof of Virginia Villa, less of a cloud would have rested upon the spirit of the mistress of that trim abode. And yet one constable, against the overpowering numbers now moving with measured tread towards the residence of the obnoxious manager of Silverseam pit, would have been but as a dog against a pack of winter wolves.

The tramp of heavy feet, the crashing in of the garden-gate, and the

crackling of shrubs and flower-bearing bushes in the garden itself, startled Mrs. Bates from her slumbers.

“There are a lot of people about the house—after no good!” she exclaimed; “those pitmen, I am sure. Oh, George!”

Mr. Bates hastily flung on his clothes, threw up the sash, and thrust his head out of the bed-room window. The lawn was black with men. They filled the gravelled paths. They swarmed, thick as ants, about the house, silent all, save for a smothered growl, or a whispering here and there.

“What’s all this—trespassing! What do you want?” Bates began his inquiries boldly enough, but his voice quavered a little as he concluded. It was a hoarse, savage laugh that answered him, and he shrank back from the sound

of it more promptly than he would have done from a shower of stones and hard words.

"I don't think they mean any harm, George," said, in a low voice, his wife, as she clung to him; "ah, yes! they are breaking into the house!"

And, indeed, the splintering of broken glass and broken woodwork was instantly followed by the thud of heavy boots upon the stair, and the low sound of many voices speaking in thick, suppressed tones.

"Do you want to rob me? Are you housebreakers, you scoundrels?" bawled out Bates, rushing out upon the landing-place, a five-chambered revolver in his hand, which trembled as he held it out. Bates was not a coward. Like most men, he would have shirked danger if

practicable—only fools and heroes seek it—but he was not unwilling to fight if needs must, though hardly against overwhelming odds. There were eight or ten faces visible at the head of the stairs, and of the eight or ten men to whom they belonged, all, save two, flinched when the pistol was presented. One of the two, a ruddy young man, burst into a silly, scornful laugh. The other, older by several years, said never a word, but rushed forward as a Spanish bull charges upon the matador. Bates fired—that is to say, he sent one ball into the lath and plaster above the assailant's head, and snapped off the second chamber without result, an ugly trick which revolvers are prone to play to those who neglect to keep them oiled, cleaned, and efficient. In another moment he was in

the grip of his far more powerful adversary, disarmed, and clutched so tightly by the throat, that his voice died away in ineffectual cluckings, like that of a throttled hen.

“Well done! Gi’ it to un, Ned!” vociferated the men behind, and the luckless Bates was pummelled, and cuffed, and kicked, and hustled downstairs, while his wife vainly screamed out “Help!” and “Murder!” till strength failed her, and the children from their nursery set up their shrill wail, and it was echoed by the maid-servants, though more feebly. The girls were almost too frightened to scream very loudly.

“Have him out o’ t’ house!” Somebody called out authoritatively these words, and the captive, passed from hand to hand, was dragged into the garden,

and huddled down the path, and through the gate, and through a gap in the fence of the next field, at the other end of which flowed, black and sluggish, the waters of the Tyne Canal.

Until, through the dusk and gloom of night, he caught sight of the steep clay banks and the sullen black water, Bates had not had the slightest idea of the designs of the rioters. Grievous bodily harm, death perhaps, he had reason, from the obvious ill-will and fierceness of the crowd, to expect, but he was not an imaginative man, and had anticipated nothing beyond the being beaten, or trampled, to a jelly. When he saw the water he became paler than before, and began, though awkwardly, to argue and to plead for his life, instinctively addressing what he said to the

strong man, with a black crape fall over his face, who had wrested the pistol from his hand, and who now held him by the collar. This man had not struck him, or cursed him, as other and younger rioters had done, yet Bates felt more afraid of him than of any of the rest.

The foremost group, five or six of whose members wore crape masks, though these were not of necessity the most active in the business on hand, reached the brink of the canal.

“Dost want to pray a minit, master?” asked the man whose knuckles were inside the manager’s shirt-collar, and these words did more to break down the shaken residue of Bates’ courage than the most bloodthirsty threat could have done.

With dry lips he answered, “I—why

—you want to frighten me—I’ve done nothing—I——” and then broke down.

Those behind began to grow clamorous, hoping, perhaps, by dint of noise to stifle the reproaches of conscience.

“In wi’ un!” “Duck the cur!” “Let’n un try the taste o’ cold watter!” cried out several young voices. As usual, the bearded men pushed the striplings forward to do the work of cruelty. Of the three or four who scrambled down the clay bank, and stood waist-deep in the water at the edge of the canal, all but one were smooth-faced, shallow-brained youths, tall and large-limbed as they were. That one was the powerful man who wore the crape mask.

“Duck him!” “Duck him!” “Gi’ the Butty his allowance!” called out impatient voices. A long-legged lad, the

same who had laughed foolish defiance when the manager of Silverseam presented his pistol, now grasped Bates with both his raw-boned hands, and succeeded in forcing his head below water.

"Look'n, mates, he be a-fishing for crayfish," chuckled out the youthful tormentor.

By a violent effort, spluttering and gasping, poor Bates lifted his white face, down which blood was trickling, above the surface of the stream. He shook himself free, and struck at the young fellow who had held him, and made an effort to scramble up the slippery bank. But the man who wore the crape mask caught hold of him, by wrist and throat, with a grasp that mastered his struggles as easily as though he had been a child.

“Under ye go again, my Jack Otter,” snarled out the fellow savagely. “This is no sport, my Lunnoner. We’ll gar ye duck, and we’ll gar ye drown.”

Bates had hardly time to hear his wife’s shrieks, as she ineffectually tried to break through the dense mob, before down went his head again below the cruel, suffocating water, and there was a roaring in his ears as of the waves of the sea, and coloured lights appeared to dance and swim before his dazzled eyes, and then life seemed to slide away from him in a dreamy swoon—a swoon that was broken by his being violently torn from the water and jerked up to the bank, where he lay, with half-closed eyes, helpless.

“Who dared do that?” demanded the man in the crape mask. “Aha, Paul!

I might ha' guessed the only chap that could."

"And I know thee, Ned Foord, spite o' the mask on thy face. I've seen it held up, bold enough, in the broad daylight. But then ye warn't ashamed, friend, o' what ye did."

The surprise had been so sudden, the plucking of the half-drowned victim from the hands that held him had been so quickly done, that those who crowded together on the bank could scarcely realize what had occurred. They had been watching, with a sort of dull, cruel pleasure, the immersion of the unpopular manager of the Silverseam pit; and now, lo and behold! somebody had come between mob vengeance and its object.

"Will ye let yon Methody choke you off from your just revenge?" hissed out

a voice from behind a crape mask, amidst the crowd; and then there was a roar of wrath. "In wi' Bates!" "Drown the Butty!" "Coom out, there, Paul Knox, for we'n sworn to hev his blood, and we'll hev it, coom what will!"





CHAPTER XII.

ON THE BANKS OF THE TYNE CANAL.

HISSES and groans met his ears, but Paul Knox, standing in the water, his head towering above all others, appeared to be master of the situation; but now a fierce reaction was making itself manifest among the crowd.

“Down wi’ un!” “What’s he here for?” “Toss in Bates, and ha’ done wi’t!” were the ominous cries that came from the rear.

“Thou hearest, Paul?” said Ned Foord emphatically. “Best save thy skin, lad, and keep thy sermon for next meeting-day.”

“I am here,” returned Paul, in the deepest tones of his ringing voice, “just because I want to save you, mates and neighbours, from doing a great crime, because I want not to be ashamed o’ the parish I was born in, or the companions I’ve worked wi’, and because I can’t bear to see a Christian treated like a blind kitten—no, not though ’twere Butty Bates.”

“And so he’s turned informer, and set the police upon us!” cried out a voice, in no north-country accent; and there were oaths and threats and outcries—a Babel of sounds, over which Paul’s accents rose in their sonorous strength as he replied—

"Thou liest, stranger, and thou knowest it. No Capel man ever thought the thought, or said the word, of Paul Knox. I'm a north-country pitman, speaking to pitmen, not to thee.—Now, dear neighbours—playmates, many of ye; mates at work, nigh all—gi' me, for once, my own way. I'm not a man craves boons very often. Gi' me, for grace, this one—the life, such as 'tis, in yon wretched thing on the bank there."

There was a deep reluctant growl. The bull-dog does not like to be bidden to loose his prey before he has done worrying it. "Bates is a tyrant!" "Bates deserves all he gets!" cried several of the bystanders at once.

"What ails ye, Paul, to meddle wi' us? Preach to your chapel-folk, and leave us alone," said Ned Foord, encouraged by these malcontent remarks.

“I’ve not preached,” returned Paul, in the same measured, steady tone that he had used throughout. “I’ve not asked of you for God’s sake not to squeeze the little breath that’s left to him out o’ yon poor thing on the bank. I’ve just begged it as a favour—perhaps the first I ever asked o’ mortal man—to Paul Knox. Won’t ye grant it me, mates? I never denied any one what I could fairly and honestly give.”

“No, no, that’s true; Paul’s never held back on a rainy day, not he!” exclaimed more than one of those present.

These signs of wavering seemed to provoke the anger of some of the masked men. There arose a fresh outcry, after much muttering and whispering, of “Down wi’ ’un!” “Push him back!” “Finish off the job!” and then a

counter-cry of "Na, na!" "Hearken to Paul!" "Butty's had enough this bout."

Mr. Bates, gurgling and gasping like a great fish newly brought ashore, wet, dank, and miserable, lay quite passive, and made no effort to speak. It was, perhaps, the very wisest course, with regard to his own safety, that he could possibly have adopted. Mrs. Bates had ceased to scream, but her sobs were distinctly audible in the background.

"Make him promise to take back the Union hands!" shouted a miner on the bank.

"Let him do away wi' the new rules!" called out another.

"Force him to gi' us back our old wage!" bawled a third.

"And, if he won't, send him to the

fishes!" put in Ned Foord, more ferociously than the rest.

Paul passed his hand across his heated brow. Something had been gained, in that the mob, instead of menacing instant death to the obnoxious manager, contented itself with demanding a different administration of the mine under his control.

"Listen one moment, neighbours," said Paul Knox earnestly, but with unruffled good-humour; "there's not one here that dislikes the new rules, or new wages, worse than I do. But we ought not to clap saddle on the wrong horse. Bates, here, is but a servant. He's no pleasant-spoken chap, nor pleasant-mannered, but the rules were none o' his making, and the wage 'll go up at Silverseam when it's up to the old rate

elsewhere. As for the Union men, if 'twere without orders he locked them out, why——”

“Ask him!” “Let's have the truth out of him!” interrupted half a dozen voices, and the unfortunate manager, being roughly questioned, contrived with white lips to stammer out an apologetic admission of the fact that he had used his own discretion on the point in question.

“Ye did, did ye?” was the irate reply, and a few sugar-plums of speech were lavished on the prostrate man, and something was said as to the propriety of making an example. But the old fury of the crowd had cooled itself.

A perception that the iron was no longer hot, that the moment for implicating the assemblage in a joint act of

cruelty had passed, made itself patent to two or three of the wire-pullers whose errand it had been to manipulate the rabble. A middle-sized man, whose accent was neither that of London nor of the collieries, seemed especially disgusted at the change that had come over the popular spirit. "Down in the potteries," he said, sullenly, "or in Yorkshire, for the matter o' that, we'd have set yon psalm-singer swimming along with the capitalist's bloodhound he's speechifying for. We're men, we are. But here you seem uncommon soft!"

"Paul being so much liked. Nobody else would be listened to," murmured Mr. Bunch, apologizing for the tender hearts of the north-country coal-miners.

"Are the Union lads to be took back at Silverseam?" demanded Ned Foord threateningly.

"If I were you, mates," said Paul Knox, in answer, "I'd not ask a man in Bates' condition whether or no the Union hands should be allowed to come back. 'Tis ill bargaining between a half-drowned——"

"Pity he weren't whole-drowned!" interjected Ned.

"Between a half-drowned man," went on Paul Knox, "and them that's whole and sound. Let the chap, when he's got over this night's mess, ask his own heart whether he'll try to keep Englishmen out o' work, because they've combined according as the laws of England allow."

"You know how to curry favour, don't 'ee, Paul, wi' the man in power?" said Ned Foord, with a sneer.

"Do I?" answered the tall young man, his sallow face flushing crimson,

as even by that dim light could be seen. "Hev I proved it, mates? The words I have spoken of the Butty here, listening, hev they been soft, smooth words? or hev I tried to flatter him as was overseer over me but last week, and maybe will be overseer again, if ever I go down shaft at Silverseam more? No! I've spoke my mind, faithful, for the love of the God that made me, for the love of my fellow-man—for he is my fellow-man, yon creature lying there, grovelling like a crushed worrum—but as for Bates and his works, neighbours, I value them no more than you do."

There was fire in Paul's eye; there was music, for once, in his deep full voice; the very action of his right hand, flung out unconsciously, was such as great orators might have envied. And

the crowd, mobile, fickle, prone to impulse—as all mobs are—set up a cheer.

There must have been something of the instinct of the born diplomatist about Paul, so quickly did he take advantage of the fair weather now announced by the fickle barometer of the popular mind.

“Let his wife have him; give him up to her, the poor half-dead creature that he is, and let her care for un,” said Bates’ rescuer; and, accordingly, weeping Mrs. Bates was allowed to pass through the crowd, and to approach her husband.

“Stop! To-morrow he’ll swear the peace agin ye all, and the soldiers and police ’ll be rummaging every man’s house in the parish!” said the Birmingham man, and a general murmur responded to his words.

“He wouldn’t; he wouldn’t, indeed, gentlemen; he’d not breathe a word,” sobbed out Mrs. Bates, in terror.

“Swear him on the Bible!” called out the well-known voice of Mr. Bunch; and after some delay a Bible was fetched from the house, and the unhappy manager was made to take a solemn oath that no legal proceedings against his persecutors should be the result of that night’s work.

“Now let him go in, and get warm again,” said Paul, when this ceremony was complete; and, inconsistently enough, when they saw that Bates was really unable to stand, and that his wife’s strength was inadequate to the task of supporting him, two of the very men who had been anxious to drown him lent their muscular arms to the labour of assisting

their late enemy to regain the dwelling from which he had been rudely torn.

“And we might ha’ finished wi’ the vermin, and taught a lesson to every Butty from York to the Wall,” growled out Ned Foord resentfully, “but for a canting, mealy-mouthed——”

“Hark ye, Ned,” interrupted Paul, “I’ve been patient, and I’m patient yet, since I know when a man’s blood’s up he don’t pick and choose his words; but fair play, mate! Thou speak’st as though there were ill blood between thee and me!”

It was Foord’s turn to grow crimson now. He had flung aside his mask, and his face was plainly to be seen. Both he and Paul were by this time out of the water, and on the bank, and there they stood, confronting one another.

Before this, however, the mob had increased in numbers, and that by the addition to its muster of sundry grave-eyed, quiet-looking miners, who had slipped unobtrusively in among the first comers, and elbowed their way towards the scene of action. These were Silver-seam hands, one and all, the chapel-folk and book-worms, the men who loved religion or science better than ale and skittles, and whose lives were a protest against the coarse epicureanism of their thoughtless compeers.

When first Paul Knox had interposed between the rioters and their victim, he had but his single prowess on which to rely, if words failed. But before the damp Mr. Bates was handed over to his wife's safe keeping, Paul was no longer alone against a crowd, for the

men of his own way of thinking gathered round him like a body-guard. It may be that this circumstance had exercised some influence over the final decision of the throng, when Bates was dismissed to his blankets; but it would be unjust to attribute the veering round of the popular sentiment to the reinforcement of material strength which had come to Paul's aid. The true victory had been won when first the mob consented to listen to the voice of the tall young pitman, who had been so bold in the cause of mercy.

Foord reddened to his eyes. "Ill blood," he repeated, half shyly, half defiantly; "mebbe 'tis as ye say, my lad!"

"And why?" asked Paul, in the grave, sweet manner which was peculiar to him, so utterly frank and simple that it might

have been that of a fearless child, yet with all the weight which a sense of the responsibilities of manhood could confer. "More than once, Ned, hev I fancied ye owed me a grudge. Did I ever do thee wrong? If I did, I'd make boot for't, and ask pardon after."

"Not wrong," sulkily answered Ned Foord; "not that sort o' wrong! I doan't love 'ee, Paul, but I say to thy face thou'st niver done any tyke harm to the value o' penny-piece or pin's-head—on'y too free-handed; 'tain't that. 'Tis the swaggering ways on thee, as though thou wert over-good, thou and thy Methodies chaps, to empty a can, or take a bit o' sport, wi' the likes of us. When we was lads, working Threephams way, we wrestled, didn't we? And again, when first they took thee on at Silverseam, first

bout ye got best o't; second, umpire said 'twere a drawn game. I challenged ye, later, to wrestle at the Fenwick Arms, for five pound a side, and ye wouldn't. Methodies don't try a fall for pewter, it seems, and I get my bread by't now; for 'tis seldom I go down a pit. And at Newcastle, and Longtown, and Carlisle, they throw in my teeth, 'Paul Knox licked ye, and woan't gi' ye the chance o' proving which be the best man o' the two.' "

There was much in this speech which commended itself to the sympathies of those who heard it. The jealousy of the professional athlete against the former adversary who had foiled him of old, and had declined to allow him to regild his laurels by the chance of a fresh triumph, was perfectly comprehensible to the

dullest brain there. And then the mob felt a longing for some new source of excitement. There had been some disappointment as to the drowning of Bates, such as huntsmen feel when the fox has run to earth and the pack has not been blooded. Hence the cry, "A fight! a fight! Ned Foord and Paul Knox! Let the best man win!"

"We are not going to fight, Ned and I," answered Paul, with a composure that was almost stoical; "enemies do that, or poor wretches that would half murder their own brothers for the chance o' a five-pound note at fair-time. But fast friends may wrestle, though I'd not, for one, consent to do it for money, nor to fill the till of a sporting publican. If, Ned, thou'd like a bout for love, I be ready."

Ned's answer was to toss off his upper garments, and to roll up his shirt-sleeves, baring a pair of brawny arms that looked as strong and as hairy as those of a bear. He was a very strong man, some three years older than Paul, and with remarkable depth of chest and development of muscle. In height he was indeed inferior to the tall young pitman, but none knew better than Ned that great stature rather tells against than in favour of a wrestler. Still, with all his strength, and all his practised dexterity, Ned Foord was not without misgivings as he stood up, face to face with Paul Knox, who on his part had made no preparations for the struggle.

And those misgivings were fully justified by the result. Vainly did the professional wrestler essay every trick and

feint of which he was master, and vainly did he strain every muscle and sinew of his powerful frame in the effort to overthrow his towering antagonist. Again and again he strove—panting for breath, flushed, purple-faced, and the heat-drops bedewing his swarthy brow—to perform a task which seemed as hopeless as that of uprooting a tree by his single force. And then, when he was weary and baffled, Paul, who had hitherto acted wholly on the defensive, suddenly changed his tactics, and Ned Foord, with no breath in his body, and with a galaxy of stars gleaming before his eyes, was flung sprawling on his back, and lay motionless.

“I’ve been a’most over-rough with him!” said the victor gently, and with no sign of elation at the hurrahs of the

enthusiastic spectators. Somebody lifted the head of the fallen man, and somebody else poured a small quantity of rum or whisky, from a pocket-flask, between his lips. He'll do now," was the verdict. But when, with some friendly assistance, the defeated champion arose staggering to his feet, there was some little curiosity among those present to see how he would greet his victorious adversary. Some of the youngsters, in especial, nourished a secret hope that he would fly at Paul's throat, and the battle be renewed. But Ned Foord did no such thing.

"Wilt shake hands, Paul?" he asked half timidly, but with no sullenness in his tone. Paul took his hand at once.

"No malice, old friend?" he said, smiling.

“Not a bit of it,” answered the beaten man; “’twas a fair fall, and fairly played, and ’tis on’y a pity, Paul, ye doan’t take to the ring. Thwackins! ye’d wear the Belt, wi’ all the silver o’ all the towns, ef ye handled the champions as ye’ve handled me!”

The best side of the stern, reticent English nature was uppermost now in Ned Foord—not a good man, but of sterling manly stuff, that might have been moulded into rugged excellence had it but been taken in hand at an earlier and more malleable age. And there was this much of merit in the defeated wrestler, that he bore his defeat, it might be said, nobly. He had been beaten, and that before many eyes, and the news of his discomfiture would spread itself throughout drinking booths and sporting bars,

from Nottingham to Penrith, and operate to his disadvantage when odds were laid and matches made. And yet he was so far honest and sincere that he felt a real admiration for the man who had laid him on his back—a real thankfulness to the man who had consented, after years of grudging doubt, to measure strength with him.

“Shake hands again, Ned, lad,” said Paul, smiling; and the baffled gladiator shook hands with his conqueror, and felt, secretly, a little proud of the greeting as persons in a private station, when publicly graced by the salutations of royal personages or renowned statesmen, are apt to feel.

“And Bates is to be let off—now and ever—promise me that, mates, one and all?” called out Paul, still smiling.

“Yes, yes! Woan’t harm a hair o’ him!” answered the crowd. And thus was completed the work that little May began beside the honeysuckle hedge.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLIVE-BRANCH.

ORDER—a different order from that which the Russian Prime Minister exultingly proclaimed when the blood-stained streets of Warsaw had been swept clear by cannon-shot and lances of the Cossack—now reigned in Capel. Men were going back to their work, somewhat slowly, partially, and irregularly, but yet labour was revived, and the beer-engine at the “Miners’ Delight” was less busy, and the whirring

gins and ventilators at the top of the gaping shafts had resumed some of their old activity. Silverseam pit was in full yield once more, for Mr. Bates, the manager, from his sick-bed had sent word that the obnoxious rules were "suspended," and that Union men were welcome to resume their labours without impertinent questions being asked as to their Unionism.

Mr. Bates, like Ned Foord the wrestler, had taken his defeat well. His narrow escape from death, the tears and anguish of his faithful wife, the savage inroad that had been made upon his home, these things had shaken the ingrained self-conceit which, till then, had made him form an overweening estimate of his own importance. But, strange to say, what impressed him more than all else, more

than the ferocity or the wanton recklessness of the rioters, more even than the memory of his dire peril, was the half-expressed scorn of the brave, pure-hearted man who had stood forward, against great odds, to save him. Paul Knox had rescued him at no slight personal risk, and by no trifling efforts, from a violent and tragical ending to a career which Bates himself could hardly have classed as one of lofty views or noble uses. But Paul, even as he interposed between the object of the public hate and the death that seemed so near, had made no secret of his opinion of the manager of Silverseam pit; and Bates, as he turned groaning in his bed, winced when he remembered the quiet censure which the young pitman's words expressed.

It was because he was so just, so

lenient even, so evidently desirous not to press unduly on the fallen, that Bates felt so bitterly the sting of the words that had dropped from those honest lips. Some of the rabble had called the manager a thief and a cheat. At insults such as these he could afford to smile, even on his bed of pain. They did not gall him, for on these heads his conscience was void of offence. He was no cheat, no thief, had not wronged the Marquis, or the colliers who worked for the Marquis, of a single halfpenny. But he did begin to suspect, since Paul had spoken out thus unreservedly, that he was what is less contemptible, but perhaps more noxious, a meddlesome, ire-provoking excrescence on the industrial system, a Jack-in-office, such as were Empson and Dudley, and many an old Teller of

the Exchequer or Clerk of the Council that has ended miserably on Tower Hill.

Sometimes we see ourselves for an instant in a mirror held up before us by unfriendly hands, and are shocked at the presentment of that worst and weakest side of ourselves, which we would fain forget or conceal. Bates was in just such a predicament. Hitherto he had called his fussy, almost spiteful, activity by the specious name of zeal. But he became now dimly sensible that self-importance, petulance, and the love, natural to some minds, of thwarting another's will and wishes, were largely mixed up with his genuine desire to do the best for his noble employer.

He did not love Paul Knox. We do not love those who have humbled us. There is a distinction to be drawn between

Ned Foord, fairly beaten in a trial of strength, and Mr. Bates, saved, because he was a man and a sentient thing in pain, by a rescuer who did not take the trouble to conceal the low standard at which he rated him. Paul's words rang in his ears, haunted him, taught him—no agreeable lesson—to know himself better than he had done since he was flogged at school. He felt as though Truth, with her merciless candour, her terrible scorn of shams, and steady eyes, before which all fair seemings and self-deceptions flee away like ghosts at cock-crow, had been for once embodied in the person of Paul Knox. And he did not love Paul, though he was ashamed in his own secret heart of the unconfessed feeling that, of all the actors in that night's work, the only one against whom he nourished a vindictive

sentiment was Paul, who had saved his life, but had despised him as he saved him. Bates would not, however, for worlds have confided the base feeling to the wife of his bosom, or even to his own acknowledged thoughts.

Publicly, Mr. Bates behaved, as was admitted, very well. He wrote word to the Marquis's man of business that he must take it on himself, for the moment, to suspend the regulations which had been the cause of so much heart-burning, and that, should they be deliberately maintained by the higher powers, he, at any rate, could not be the instrument to enforce them. And he added that, before resigning his post, he should feel it his duty to lay the state of Capel affairs before the Marquis in Italy. Now, there was nothing which the agent so much dis-

liked as a suggestion of disturbing the serene Olympian repose of the Marquis in Italy, by a statement of the quarrel between his hereditary colliers and his administrators at home. "And if Bates can't make the rules work, who can?" said the agent despairingly, and then wrote to express his consent to the measures which the manager thought expedient.

Wages rose, but very little, a mere fraction, a few pence weekly; yet it was a concession, and the value of a concession, especially to uneducated men, is not to be gauged by mere arithmetic. Both parties were heartily sick of the dispute. The coal-merchants in London, the exporters at the sea-ports, were clamorous for supplies. The out-put of black lumps piled at the pit-mouths was nearly ex-

hausted, and it suited colliers and coal-owners to come to terms. The withdrawal of the Silverseam rules, the readmission of Union hands to the Silverseam pit, and the nominal increase of wages, instantly imitated by the proprietors of smaller mines, brought things to their normal condition. The sensitive barometer of the London Stock Exchange registered a slight rise in public confidence when it was known that no further disturbance was expected among the colliers of the North.

“Good-bye, Bunch, good-bye!” said red-faced Mr. Cowall superciliously, as he gave two large fingers to be shaken by the deferential little secretary, on the brick platform at Capel Station, and swung his big body into the second-class carriage waiting to receive him. In the

carriage, besides a deaf old woman, a raw maid-servant going to her first place, and two little boys bound for school, was a sinister-looking man, with small black whiskers, a sallow complexion, and an air somewhat between that of an attorney's clerk and a journeyman watchmaker. These two adult male travellers exchanged no word until, at another junction, boys, maid-servant, and deaf old woman had alighted, and then the man whose associations might have been legal or industrial said drily, "Botched that business, Cowall?"

"What could you expect, with a lily-livered time-server like Bunch to manage matters?" returned the orator with disgust.

"They ought to have had Sloman in," observed the sallow man. "By this time

we'd have had all Europe talking of us, and a strike that should last till Christmas, and draw contributions from every trade, to the tune of thousands a week. What puzzles me is, who peached. How did that fellow, the preaching chap, get wind of the job about Bates? I'd lay my life there's a woman in the case."

Mr. Cowall shook his head. "They don't count for much, women don't, among our coaly friends yonder. I suppose somebody prattled in his cups."

"I'd lay my life there's a female at the bottom of this!" reiterated the other energetically. "There mostly is, when mischief's up, and I only wish I'd known who it was that let the cat out of the bag, that's all!"

It was little May, gentle, dainty, golden-haired May, who was the fairy

whose blameless wand had conjured away the grim shapes that had darkened the threshold of Mr. Bates, and so far the nameless auxiliary of the oratorical Mr. Cowall was correct in his conjecture that female influence was at the bottom of the rescue that had been on that eventful night so gallantly performed.

Nor was the friend and eulogist of Mr. Sloman, ex-glazier and present marksman, whose unerring bullets were at the service of any accredited hirer who was ready with a guarantee of secrecy and the moderate payment of four pounds ten, very far wrong when he vindictively expressed a wish to know the name of the original informant to whom was due Paul's unwelcome presence on the banks of the Tyne Canal. Mr. Cowall was perfectly accurate in his declaration

that the feminine gender, in the coal country, was regarded as incomparably inferior to the masculine, and this not merely by men, but by women. The very rioters who had condoned Paul's interference between the rabble and its prey, would have been angry had they known that the real author of their discomfiture was little May Gwynn.





CHAPTER XIV.

MAY AND HER FRIENDS.

TIME, in his steady course, went on at Capel as elsewhere, bringing with it things good and evil. The same rolling sequence of weeks and months and years that added fresh streaks of grey to Reuben Gwynn's hair, and bowed his frame more than it had been bowed when first he brought the little waif of the Capel accident to his home, dealt generously with May, making her prettier as well as taller. Of two

stray Irishmen who were rash enough to offer to fill the places of the recalcitrants, and after some weeks' loss of wages, and consequent scarcity, was ended by the submission of the strikers. To the credit of the mutineers, it may be added that not the slightest annoyance or injury to person or property succeeded the midnight onslaught on Virginia Villa. Mr. Bates was left in peace, and not a shrub of Mr. Churton's plantations, nor a pane of glass in his conservatory, sustained harm at the hands of boy or man.

Some wonder was expressed, as months elapsed, and labour and production flowed on tranquilly in their normal channels, that promotion did not fall to the lot of a particular pitman, well known in the Silverseam mine. One "doggy," or sub-

overseer, died, and another, on whom a thumping legacy had devolved, sent in his resignation; but, contrary to the general expectation, the name of Paul Knox was not mentioned as that of the successor to either of these vacant posts. "Bates he hev a bad memory!" was a remark not unfrequently made in tap-rooms, or when pipes were smoked around the engine-fire on a rainy day.

Now, the truth was, that Mr. Bates was endowed by nature with an excellent memory, and that had he been less gifted with that quality, he could scarcely have forgotten the deep debt he owed to his rescuer, so pertinacious was his wife in reminding him of the obligation. Gratitude is an attribute of both sexes, equally, no doubt; but when a woman feels sincerely grateful, she is usually for

evincing the sentiment in a straightforward way. Mrs. Bates was grateful. The brutal savagery of the direct attack on Virginia Villa had produced a different effect upon the minds of husband and wife. The first had taken it as a warning to be more conciliatory and less consistent in his dealings with the rugged beings around him. But Mrs. Bates—to whom the inroad of the exasperated colliers appeared in the lurid light of some ghastly catastrophe, narrowly escaped, much as an earthquake or a volcanic eruption might have been—saw Paul Knox towering in gigantic proportions above what otherwise might have seemed the retrospect of a confused Walpurgis dream. Paul's personality, Paul's individuality seemed to her to be so strongly marked out, that she had

scarcely patience to listen to her husband's more lukewarm comments on his preserver. Women, fortunately for men, are economical; and yet Mrs. Bates, in the first fervour of thankfulness, pressed on her husband to offer money to Paul.

Bates shook his head. "He wouldn't take it. Proud, in his way, as Lucifer."

"Then can't you write to the Marquis, or to the agent, and get a place for him—make one, if necessary? I'm sure the estate would bear it."

But Bates did not see his way to a job on behalf of Paul.

"That hunchbacked sister of his! I'll go over and see her. I'll have her here, as soon as the place is tidied up again. And I wonder, if I were to give her a silk gown——"

"Upon my word, if I were you, I'd

not. Go and see her, and welcome, but presents would only offend those people," said Bates gravely; and his wife felt that he was right. She did go, however, to visit Kate Knox, and clasped her hands, and fell into a passion of tears as she dwelt upon the hideous terrors of that night's agonizing distress; and the two women wept together, and praised Paul behind his back, as seldom have a hero's praises been sung—a hero, be it remembered, who wore no bravery of gold-laced uniform and waving plumes, but faced danger in the coarse slops of a working miner.

But of substantial reward for the good action which he had done, Paul neither received nor craved for anything at all. Two appointments in the manager's gift fell in, but they were filled up without reference to Paul Knox.

"What! You've passed him over again, surely, George?" Mrs. Bates had said, in eloquent amazement.

"I have passed him over, as you call it, Jane," answered Mr. Bates serenely, "because my private feelings must not influence me where the interests of the estate and the claims of others are concerned. The person I have chosen is his senior, and well-conducted and intelligent, and fit for the place. Most respectable man, Stokes."

"Fiddlesticks!" interrupted the irreverent Mrs. Bates. "Stokes never saved your life, did he?"

And Bates grew red, and was silent. He was perhaps in error when he declared that his private feelings should not influence his conduct as manager of Silverseam. He had never quite forgiven Paul

Knox for the contempt with which he had regarded him.

Now, Bates was not a monster. Had there been a chance that Paul would have accepted money in payment for the priceless service he had rendered, how cheerfully would the manager have drawn a cheque for £100—for £200—nay, on a pinch, for £300! And, what was odd but true, had such a pecuniary recompense been acknowledged with a receipt in full for all claims, Bates would have liked Paul Knox vastly better than he did. There are those to whom the burthen of gratitude is all but insupportable, to whom a great benefit appears almost as a personal injury, and Bates was one of them. "Saved my life, I know he did, and be hanged to him!" soliloquized he, as he wended his way to his office, a

glazed shed near the works. "I could almost be sorry he didn't take the other tack, so sick am I of having it thrown in my teeth. I wish I could save *his* life, and be quits."

While on this topic it may be mentioned that, some two years after the riots at Capel, another opportunity was given to the manager of Silverseam pit of choosing between his private feelings and his sense of duty. The respectable Mr. Stokes, having made some mistakes in his accounts, absconded with what loose cash he could lay hands upon ; and Mr. Bates, solemnly, and in a quasi-public and wholly pompous manner, offered the vacancy to Paul. It was civilly declined.

"Now, my good man, my friend, take time to consider," said the manager, rattling his watch-chain. "Don't throw

away a chance, my lad, of rising in the world. Fortune, let me tell you, very seldom knocks twice at any man's door. Reject this offer, and I'm afraid you'll be, for life, one of the mere rank and file."

"And I ask no better, sir, than to continue, as ye say, among the mere rank and file, as I was born," replied Paul. "A plain pitman I've been since I was old enough to go down shaft, and, if thee please, Mr. Bates, I'll be a plain pitman still."

"Then, of course, there's no more to be said," snapped out the manager, and the conversation ended.

"It's my belief," Mr. Churton observed, when he heard of this disinterestedness on Paul Knox's part (for a "doggy's" place is one better remuneration).

rated, as well as less laborious, than that of a simple miner, besides its being regarded as a stepping-stone to better things)—“It’s my belief the fellow was unwilling to take the post for fear of losing his influence over the colliers—the chapel-goers, I mean—as he might do if he ceased to be one of themselves. As it is, they swear by him.” And, indeed, there may have been some truth in this conjecture.

There was one friend of Paul’s who heard with regret his resolution to remain still a private soldier in the great army of labour, and this was Mr. Gwynn, who, as he grew more feeble, felt an increased appreciation of the merits of property.

“Work’s a grand thing, ye know,” said Paul, smiling, in answer to his remarks.

“It is, it is,” rejoined the school-

master, who was gradually getting past his own; "but, Paul, even a man of your thews and sinews must one day get old, and then yours is a perilous calling, and an accident might happen at any time."

"If it be the Lord's will, it may," answered Paul, untroubled; "but e'en then there's enough i' savings-bank to secure Kate a bit o' bread, if her sewing cannot keep her, poor lass."

"But you may marry, Paul, and then——" began the schoolmaster, when May entered, and the visitor turned smiling to greet her, so that the sentence was left unfinished. That was a singular friendship which bound May, in the bloom and freshness of her budding girlhood, to the tall, dark young pitman, whose grave earnestness of habitual de-

meanour made him appear much older than he actually was. To May, Paul seemed very like a strong elder brother, one to whose side, in danger or distress, it was natural to hasten. Paul Knox's mind on the subject was probably an enigma even to himself. He had been always fond of the child that he remembered, a poor little castaway, picked up from her nest amid the heather. But it was a fondness tempered by a sentiment of strangely chivalrous respect, such as might be shown by some generously loyal heart to a young princess in exile.

It has been mentioned that Paul, whose penmanship was admirable, had given May lessons not only in writing, but in drawing as well, and that the pupil of Mrs. Churton had attempted to teach

Paul that singing which with her was almost as instinctive as it is to the nightingale or the thrush. Paul Knox could not be taught to sing, but he was willing enough to accept May's offer to impart to him some tuition in those foreign tongues, her knowledge of which she owed to the old schoolmaster, and these he could learn aptly enough, although it was most improbable that a smattering of French or German could ever be serviceable to him.

May, too, had heard of Paul's refusal of the proffered doggyship; and she, too, was sorry that her dear friend had not taken the gift held out to him. Women always, men sometimes, are sorry when those they love do not accept the goods the gods provide, when the ribbon of the Bath, the baronetcy, the tap of the sword

that confers knighthood, are for the purest of motives refused. We would always rather that our dearest friends were to be henceforth "Sir John," or "my lord," than hear that they had thrust back the hand that held the glittering gewgaw.

"Oh, Paul! I'm grieved to hear you would not have it. No one deserved it like you," said May, half sadly, half provoked at Paul's irritating unselfishness. For women, though they will for love's sake fling away all, are yet angered by the very unselfishness in a man that makes them worship him.

"I am well enough, missy, as I am," replied Paul, in the calm of his strong nature. "I have nothing to do to-day, at least not just now, and I've time to learn a scrap more o' the French, and

have thee laugh at the way I blunder at the speaking o't, if ye will, my dear."

"Ah, Paul, Paul!" said May, sidling up to him. She was a tall, slender girl now, but there was the same pure face, the same clear blue eyes, the same shimmer of golden hair, as when Paul Knox had snatched her away from the mouth of Old Deeps pit, or when she had stood, trembling, to listen beside the honeysuckle hedge. "Will you always be the same—so much for others, so very, very little for yourself?"

"I have plenty for myself," answered Paul, with a tinge of ruddy colour rising in his sallow face; "more, I think sometimes, than my deserts warrant. As for the overlooker's place, let it go. I can do more good as I am."

"Don't scold him," said the old school-

master genially. "It's a holiday, May dear, for you and me, as well as for him, and we'll all walk out together, according to agreement, to Hazel Dell, where they say the early violets are beginning to peep already among the tufts of the bunch-grass, and——"

"Beg pardon, Mr. Gwynn; they said I'd find Paul here," said a voice hurriedly; and the shambling, lean form and the wistful face of Joseph Gubbins, ex-pointsman, and present "tenter" of a stationary steam-engine, appeared.

"It's Dick that's in trouble—Dick Brown, of Black Dog," explained the ex-pointsman, in apology for his own intrusion; and we thought—such few of us Black Dogs as were at bank, and heerd news—thou'd gi' un a hand, Paul."

"That's big Dick Brown, once at my

school, isn't it?" asked the schoolmaster. "I thought as much. I never knew a well-meaning lad who got oftener into scrâpes. But I thought he was one of yours now, Paul—turned steady and serious?"

"Ay, ay," replied the tall pitman; "but he's fell away."

Mention has been made of a certain Dick, whose pink silk necktie, and ingenuous face, and curly, shallow-brained head should, years before, have shown themselves at one of Paul's chapel lectures, but the owner of which, being easily led, spent the evening in the sporting public house within whose walls he had witnessed a memorable sparring-match between North and South.

"He's been on the burst, now, three days and more, ever since he finished

that piece-work in the four-fathom seam, he and five of 'em, at Brickley. The landlord o' the 'Feathers,' he got tired o' their noise—money main gone, too—and turned 'em out into street; and there was breaking o' windows, and breaking o' lamps, and what not, and resisting the police. Dick was locked up—t'other chaps got off, somehow—and Dick was brought before justices at Petty Sessions. Five pound. And damage. And costs. Or else six months' hard labour. He'd hev been removed before this to county gaol, on'y that he begged word might be sent to his mates. He's sick and sorry. But we couldn't raise forty shillings, among us, till pay-day."

"Ah! well, I must go to him," answered Paul Knox with ever so little of a sigh, as there flitted before his mental

vision the pleasant spring-tide holiday that he was losing, the ramble among the wooded banks and wild flowers of Hazel Dell, the kind, erudite chat of the school-master, May's pretty words and smiles, the contrast to his working life and its grimy associations. But he never hesitated.

"I'll just go over, then, to Brickley," he said, as though his going were the merest matter of course.

"I've something—towards it," put in Joseph Gubbins, pulling out a weasel-skin purse, whence he extracted seventeen shillings and eightpence. "Them two half-crowns," he said, "be mine. Madison had three bob. The rest belongs to old Hicks. Lucky, Paul, ye've got some brass put aside. Dick 'll pay up, fair, when he's addled the wage, thou knowest."

“I know,” answered Paul cheerfully; and without a word of repining he bade his friends farewell, and went upon his way.

END OF VOL. I.

